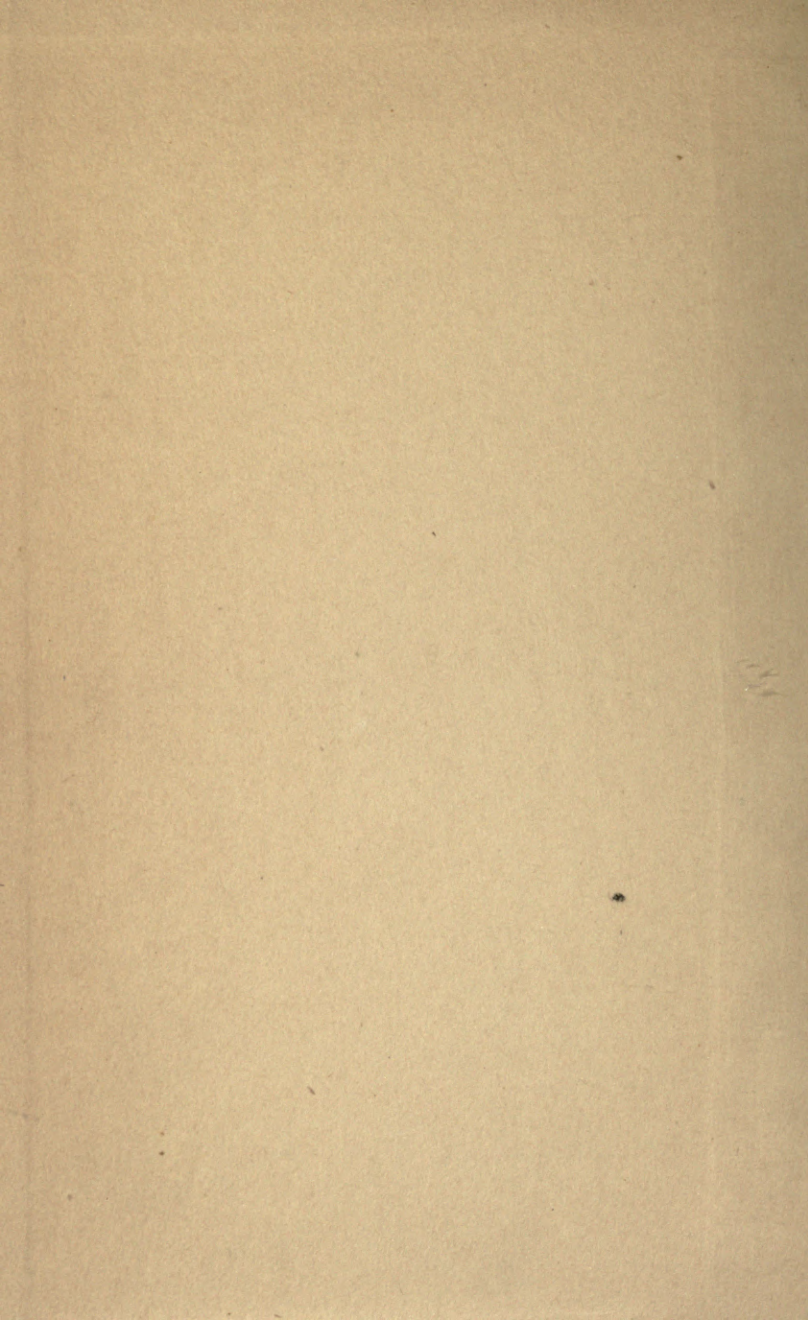


THE INCORRIGIBLE
DUKANE

GEORGE C. SHEDD



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**THE INCORRIGIBLE
DUKANE**

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"Come help me find my will "

See page 101

THE INCORRIGIBLE DUKANE

BY

GEORGE C. SHEDD

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS OF FORGE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
STANLEY L. WOOD



359
1911

BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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Entered at Stationers' Hall

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IT CRACKED LIKE A RIFLE A FEW INCHES BEFORE

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CHAPTER I

THE BLOODY FIELD OF MELTON

THE green tail-lights of the train flickered, faded, then with a sudden mischievous wink altogether disappeared; the last puffing of the engine was like a hoarse chuckle.

"Dumped in a puddle at eleven o'clock at night," Jimmy Dukane vociferated resentfully.

In the caravan just departed there was everything to comfort the soul, to cheer the mind, and moisten the palate—bright lights, snug chairs, jolly companions, a well-stocked buffet. Here?—what the deuce was here anyway except water? He faced about. Water dripped from the eaves under which he stood; water fell in large slow drops from a leak somewhere overhead into the upturned collar of his silk raincoat; water in the form of a warm drizzle saturated the night as steam fills a Turkish bath. A few miserable beams of light escaped through the dingy depot window out upon the wet platform and

gleamed glassily along the rails; some distance away in front of him glowed half a dozen misty, luminous balls like swamp-lanterns, which he surmised to be windows.

"The governor stung his son and heir this time," he remarked in immense disgust.

James A. Dukane, Sr. had, so to speak, brought down his fist on the table with a bang; James A. Dukane, Jr. had been under the fist and his eyes popped open very wide indeed. It befell thus: Dukane and Company,—New York, Pittsburg, Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake and San Francisco—was, as its numerous offices indicated, a large and extensive firm. Concrete was flesh on its bones, concrete the tissue of its brain, concrete construction the breath which issued from its body. The Dukane company would take up a bucketful of concrete and build you anything your heart desired and your mind conceived if your pocket-book could pay for it, from a canal-lock to a sea-wall, from a bridge to a three-hundred foot chimney, from a reservoir dam to a light-house, a subway, a sky-scraper, or a ten-acre factory—and it generally had half a dozen of these going at once. James A. Dukane, Sr. was the dominating will and soul of the company;

into whatever construction was undertaken he wove the fiber of his nerve as wire netting is incorporated in a floor; he stirred his bold ideas in the mixer; he reinforced walls with his backbone; and into rock, gravel, mud or water, he strode fearlessly where others faltered. So much for Dukane senior.

Dukane junior, knew nothing about concrete, except that it did not suit his taste—a noisy business, with men yelling around derricks and dumping great buckets of gray stuff like half-cooked calves' brains into huge moulds, while squat little engines chugged frantically. Besides, the governor was making plenty of money for them both. Jimmy was twenty-six, rather stocky in build, with sparkling black eyes, a rosy cheek, crisp, wavy black hair and a flashing smile. At his university he had been considered to take things "on the bounce"; during the three years since, he had continued to take them very much on the bounce, whether by fattening the "bookies," or by frisking at Palm Beach, or screaming up the river in his automobile, or pursuing those radiant, illusive, bright-eyed beings who have their orbit between the theaters and the lobster-palaces on Broadway. He

looked as if built of India rubber, and his elasticity confirmed the appearance; for there could be no two opinions—he truly took things on the bounce. How then join rubber to concrete?

Money was forthcoming for his needs but with an accompaniment of admonitions—which grew to warnings—which grew to commands. Wrath veiled the brow of Dukane senior, as clouds darken Olympus: he bided his time. Once for all now, he finally decided, he would make or break that incorrigible good-for-nothing, his son.

This resolve on the part of his father the younger Dukane should have deduced as inevitable, but did not. Admonitions, warnings, commands,—all slid off his back as do rain-drops off an industrious young gander. For he was very busy,—he himself said so, with a wrinkle marking his forehead. The blow fell at a most unfavorable season and in a most discomfiting fashion. Just why he and “Pussy” Van Orsden and Fred Cartwright, rich young fellows like himself, had gone to California, he could not have clearly explained; the origin of the expedition had to do with a dispute which arose among them as to whether

figs grew on thistles: a dispute inspired by much champagne, and in order to settle the question Pussy had ordered his father's private car hooked on a train and they thereupon set out to the land where figs flourished. Figs, they discovered, did not grow on thistles; nevertheless they had two weeks of a very lively time. It was on the third occasion of Jimmy's drawing heavy funds through the San Francisco office (he admitted that he had caromed rather briskly of late against the parental cushion) that the concrete fist smashed down on rubber.

Followed swift interchange of telegrams: full and soothing explanations from the Pacific; hot, fervid, stormy orders from the Atlantic. The prodigal was peremptorily commanded to return to New York; then this edict was cancelled and he was directed to report to the San Francisco office.

"I have here an order," the manager of that branch informed him, "to set you to work at once—to send you, for a starter, to examine the construction of the Silver Peak dam, after which you will go to New York and file your statement. Here are a railroad ticket to Melton, the nearest station, a pullman ticket and one hundred dollars."

Dukane, junior, bounced out of his chair.

"One hundred dollars—one hundred peanuts! What fun can a fellow have on a penny—and me make a report! The governor waxes humorous. I'll wire him again."

"No use. He sailed to-day for a month's absence abroad. This is final."

Jimmy digested this last news for a period of ten seconds.

"I'm shot through a wing," said he. "Perhaps I can sell my report to the comic papers. And all of a hundred dollars—I can never spend it in this life-time. Well, give me the powder, I'll send up a last rocket and come back with concrete on my hair and fingers. Do you stick your head in the bucket when making an examination?"

This ridicule the manager ignored. "Would you like to see your father's last telegram?" he inquired, with the flicker of a smile.

"To be sure. Dad's always interesting, even when pettish."

The other handed him a yellow sheet. It read:

"Will be a month in London, make him work or let him starve—James A. Dukane."

The youth returned the sheet.

"Shot through both wings," said he; and departed.

Now here he was at Melton, somewhere in the desert of Nevada where it "never rained." Was that black space between him and the globular blurs of light a street, a swamp, or a river?

At his elbow a voice spoke.

"Lend me a quarter, Mister, for a bite and a bed."

Ordinarily Jimmy would have given him a coin; but now he was displeased, not at the hobo, not at the rainy night, but at a certain gentleman of the same name as himself who that very minute was voyaging across the Atlantic in splendid luxury.

"Nothing doing; I've only fifty dollars—broke myself."

"Only a quarter—"

"Beat it, child of darkness!"

Seizing his traveling bag he started for the lights opposite, while a stream of curses followed him from the tramp. The street he had to cross was not quite a swamp, nor yet a river, but there were mire, pools and puddles; when he came into the dingy little hotel, he was soaked and bedraggled to the knees, while his

disposition was not improved. Over the small counter a coatless, puffy-faced, unshaven man sprawled.

"I would like a room with a bath," Jimmy said, sweetly.

"And a piano, perhaps, and flowers in the morning." The man eyed him belligerently.

Discretion, Jimmy concluded, was the better part of valor. He invited the man to join him in a drink, which smoothed their acquaintance to a more amiable intercourse. When they returned from the barroom, Jimmy observed that the tramp who had accosted him upon the depot platform had put in an appearance in the barren tobacco-scented office and occupied a corner chair. It was a nasty night; he felt in his pocket for some small coins, but found none, remembering that he had given the last to his sleeping car porter.

"You get the bridal-chamber—only room with a window to the front," the proprietor addressed Dukane, leading him across to a door. "If you need a bath, kick loose the screen and step out into the rain." And with a huge guffaw the man went back to his counter.

There was a window and there was a screen; the window was up, for the night was sultry, and an invisible insect buzzed at intervals along the screen. A strip of stained wall-paper depended from the ceiling; the wash-stand, on which stood the smoky lamp, had a washbowl, chipped pitcher and an ancient cake of soap; a few nails had at some time been driven in one wall for hooks.

He locked the door. Meditatively removing his clothes he folded them upon the foot-rail of the bed and donned his pajamas. He laid himself between the blankets—ye gods, blankets in summer time!—and continued to meditate. For rubber, it appeared, was after all about to be joined to concrete; which was deserving of reflection. Through the thin shell of the wall he could hear the noise made by maudlin patrons of the barroom; presently he distinguished close at hand the proprietor driving forth the hobo into the street. He considered how it would feel to sleep on a wet street; it was bad enough on musty straw. The tramp's feet sounded along the board walk, paused by his window a moment, then passed. Jimmy held communion with himself on numerous subjects, for he had not been to

bed so early in many, many moons. Outside, the drip of water continued in a subdued nocturne; on the rusty screen the insect buzzed its lonesome lament.

When he opened his eyes it was still to the sound of dripping water, but the insect had folded its wings and retired. Gray light of day stood in the window; a faint rattle of dishes sounded from somewhere near; he sat up yawning and running his fingers through his hair. All at once he bounced out upon the floor. Where were his clothes, where his traveling bag. At his feet lay a bunch of wet objects resembling rags and two lumps of mud—vile trousers, sodden shirt and coat, shapeless hat, shoes. He ran to the door, unlocked it, put his head forth.

“Here you, I’ve been robbed!” he cried.

A pallid, thin-lipped individual, with head shaven to the smoothness of a billiard ball, stood behind the desk.

“Room paid for?”

“No, I’ve been robbed, I say. Screen taken out.”

“Well?”

Jimmy fairly danced.

“Don’t ‘well’ me!” he shouted.

"Room not paid for and robbed. Old stall—won't work."

"By heaven, I'll teach you!"

Jimmy in a rage, indifferent to all but the shiny-pated man who insinuated that he was a liar, rushed back to the heap on the floor, jerked the dirty garments on over his pajamas, thrust his feet into the lumps of mud, slapped the disreputable hole-pierced hat upon his head and bounced out into the office.

The man had come from behind the desk, while a second individual had joined him, a low-browed fellow wearing a soiled apron tied about his waist and carrying one hand behind his back.

"You damnable nest of robbers!" Jimmy roared.

"See that door?" the thin-lipped man responded. "Climb through a window into our bed, will you? Out you go!"

He reached for Jimmy. The latter's fist caught him on the jaw, staggering him. A moment of flying arms, ducking heads and whirling bodies followed, a struggle cyclonic in character with Jimmy as the axis; then the youth had a brief vision of an uplifted beer bottle in the hand of the man who wore the

apron, which was succeeded by a stream of stars and lightnings, then swift darkness.

There is a tale of a certain magic carpet which bore its possessor at will about the domain of Arabia or elsewhere; but the singular property of eliminating space which this wonderful rug held has never been clearly explained or understood. A similar and startling transversion of distance, a dip into the Fourth Dimension, as it were, occurred in the case of young Dukane—only there was no carpet. He seemed to wink for one instant, then he found to his astonishment that he sat in a puddle in the street. One of his hands was pressed to his head, his lips were shaped to a round O of exclamation, while the seat of his ragged trousers was very, very wet; mud smeared his person and his face, blood and mud adorned one cheek in a fashion to stir the colorful soul of an Indian chief about to don his war-paint and one eye was puffed and blackened.

“Whew, did the boiler blow up?” he asked himself. He had been bounced very hard indeed.

A throbbing pain under the egg-like lump on which his hand rested recalled the vision of

the lifted bottle. An empty beer bottle may prove both useful and dangerous; he fingered his cranium tenderly to discover if there were in it any crevice or chasm. Finally he climbed to his feet and crossed to the depot, where he asked for a telegraph blank, but the agent eyeing him with disfavor inquired if he had money to pay for the dispatch of a message. Jimmy discussed with him the ethics of C. O. D. telegrams, discussed the subject vigorously, only to retire in defeat to a window of the waiting room where he whistled softly and ruminated upon the rudeness of railway employees. The reflection of his face in the glass caught his eye: it was a startling but not handsome face; it was not the face of anyone whom he had ever known; it was a totally strange, disreputable, dilapidated, depraved, villainous face, it was a face to ponder. Withdrawing from the depot he mounted one of several freight cars that stood on a siding and on its top cast up accounts.

Presently a passenger train thundered into the station and took water from the wayside tank before proceeding on its journey. He considered the advisability of boarding it, but recollected the evil face that had confronted

him in the window; railroads are not lenient with hoboes. As the train wheels began to move the door of the freight car on which he sat was flung back, a figure leaped forth and ran towards the departing passenger. Upon the head of the man rested a derby hat, a silk raincoat fluttered about his body and he carried a smart hand-bag. At sight of this familiar paraphernalia, a yell burst from Jimmy's lips; he scrambled down the iron rungs of the car, gave chase, but the man was already aboard, the train was now moving rapidly and a mocking hand waved at him.

"The blue ribbon is mine—I beat all comers in the idiot class," said he, disgustedly.

The rest of the day was what Dukane junior very properly designated dull. Melton was not a populous habitation; it comprised the depot, water tank, the dingy hotel, a Chinese restaurant, three saloons, a livery stable, two empty, windowless buildings, a board walk and a pump. In the trough under the spout of the pump he washed his battered face and performed such a toilet as is possible with mere fingers. During the afternoon he tried to steal unobserved upon a west-bound train, but was kicked off by an unsympathetic, burly

brakeman. Then for a time he watched the station-agent at work in a box-car, at rather curious work. The man cut the cords of bags of cement stamped with red lettering and poured the fine grayish powder into other bags printed with blue lettering, which he sewed up with needle and twine. Jimmy approached the car and leaned elbows upon the door sill.

"I'm not fond of red either," he remarked, friendlily.

The agent whirled about with a palpable start, a shadow of fear on his face, then cursed him fiercely.

Jimmy retired; nevertheless he remained mystified as to why cement was better in blue than in red-lettered bags. He would some day put the question to his father, who knew all that was to be known about cement. Meanwhile the drizzle fell steadily. At supper time he walked back and forth upon the board walk, where the odors emanating from the kitchen tantalized his nostrils. He was of the opinion that he could eat even cabbage—and he loathed cabbage, a food fit only for goats. That night he dreamed he was about to dine with Pussy and Fred Cartwright at Sherry's, but as he sat at table something was continually press-

ing on his shoulders, while the waiter held his nose with thumb and forefinger grinning at him; then he awoke to find that it was only the bottom of the box car where he had sought repose which made his shoulder blades ache and instead of a waiter clutching his proboscis he was sniffing with a heavy cold.

"And I never even got a mouthful of that supper," he groaned, vainly seeking a more comfortable position.

Next morning he went into the depot waiting room for warmth; his head felt like one of the cabbages he hated; he sniffled much, for he had no handkerchief. The agent eyed him through his ticket window with strong disapproval and coldly denied his request for food. It was some time later, after the man had gone forth to continue his transfer of the contents of the cement bags, that a bright-eyed, brown-haired little woman, with a child clinging to her skirt, brought him a plate of bread and a steaming cup of coffee.

"I heard you ask," she said. "We live upstairs and I sometimes relieve my husband at the key. You're really hungry, aren't you?"

Jimmy experienced a sensation such as he

might have felt if he beheld an angel descending from Heaven with food on a golden platter.

"I'm so hungry I could gnaw the stove," he responded, cheerfully.

With sincere and ardent thanks he received the proffered breakfast and devoured it to the last crumb and final drop. The little woman remained awhile chatting.

"You've been hurt," she said. She stood with one hand on her hip, the other holding the empty plate and cup.

"I'm a horrible example of what awaits a hasty tongue. The keeper of the tavern and his bar-keeper nearly slew me because I resented being robbed. But after all, they were not to blame, for a tramp stole my clothes out of a window and left me these that you see me in. I'll now study over the perplexing problem of where I can find a dinner—I've four hours to do it in. I'll see if I can't invent a way to make the hotel man provide me with a meal."

But dinner was to come from an unexpected source. About noon two six-horse teams pulled down the hill north of Melton, their wheels solid disks of mud, and drew up be-

fore the car of cement, where bags began to be loaded into them. This was the nearest approach to excitement (not counting what he had participated in) Dukane had experienced, so thither he bent his way. He was now an investigator of matters concrete; he would observe concrete in the process of transportation.

A large red-faced man with a shoe-brush mustache was speaking when he arrived upon the scene.

"We need men bad. Can't get 'em."

"There's a 'bo you might take along," said the agent, tossing a bag into the wagon and nodding towards Dukane. "I'm sick of seeing him round here."

"Same to you," Jimmy returned, promptly.

The driver of the wagon faced about and regarded him.

"I'll take anybody, even a hobo," he said at length. "Here, do you want a job? Two dollars a day and board? How about your dinner?"

"Are you inviting me to join you?" Dukane inquired politely.

"Yes, soon as the horses are 'tended to."

The wagon-boxes were loaded, the teams

were soon unbridled and their noses buried in oat-filled nose-bags.

"Come along," said the man.

Satisfied as a pup who has the prospect of a meaty bone before him Jimmy followed the two drivers, the red-faced one who introduced himself as Martin and the other who answered to the sobriquet of Shorty, to the Chinese restaurant. After his previous day's fast, the bread and coffee given him by the agent's wife had only served to whet his appetite. Upon steak, potatoes, turnips and apple pie, he therefore descended silently and capaciously. Later they returned to the wagons, where the nose-bags were removed from the horses and the bridles restored.

"Climb up," Martin said, indicating the wagon-seat.

"Where are you taking me?" Dukane asked.

"To work, that's enough for you."

"I don't go blind to places."

"You don't? We'll see about that." Martin dropped the long driving lines he was gathering up and advanced towards the boy.

"I'm no common laborer," Jimmy explained, with heat.

"You soon will be."

"But I've got business—got to go to San Francisco."

"Think you can beat me out of the price of a dinner, do you? Up on the wagon you go."

"Not much, you lobster-colored—"

The sentence was never finished; Martin had grabbed for him and Jimmy knocked the man's hand away. This fight was prettier than had been the first, for here was only one man to meet and no beer bottle. Dukane was mad clear through, likewise Martin. What angered the former particularly as the contest progressed were the insults heaped on him by the agent who stood a hostile observer in the car door, suggesting, while fists flew, that Martin "knock the hobo's block off,"—"chew him up"—"put out his lights," and recommending sundry other barbarous tactics. Jimmy bounced about and fought like a demon, but Martin was larger, stronger, and bored in savagely. The boy grew sick, racked by tremendous blows, dazed by fierce jolts, and finally went down upon his back. Martin stood over him, panting. Then he took a bucket yet half full of water from supplying the horses and swished its contents upon his inert opponent. Jimmy opened his eyes, sat

up, shook the streams off his face, looked about, perceived Martin, sprang to his feet and rushed at him. *Whang*—the bucket descended upon Jimmy's head, and down he went a second time.

"He's sure a scrapper—and only a kid, too," Martin said, admiringly. "Reckon I'll have to throw him on the wagon along with the sacks."

This, however, proved to be unnecessary. Jimmy struggled to a sitting posture. He clapped his hand on his head and again his mouth opened in a round O of expostulation, for now there were present two egg-shaped lumps; nor was he any more pleasing to the eye than he had been the morning before when he found himself sitting in the street; fresh mud plastered his clothes and face, the cut on his forehead flowed blood anew.

"Are you ready to go to work, or do you want more?" Martin inquired, in business-like tones.

Jimmy Dukane gazed at the man and gazed at the bucket and then rubbed his bumps.

"Sure, I'm crazy to work," he answered.

As the wagons were drawing away, he saw the sneering agent in the car door. Rage

seethed afresh in his heart. He started to climb over the sacks of cement, shouting, "I can tear the feathers off of you anyway, you uncooked squab," but was promptly haled back and held upon the seat by Martin. Five minutes later the long-lashed whips were cracking, the teams were straining up the slippery hillside and the bloody battle-field of Melton lay behind.

CHAPTER II

SILVER PEAK

THE road twisted among a few low, treeless hills and presently emerged upon a plain of yellow dirt, level as a floor and covered with a furze of black sage brush which spread as far as eye could see to the range of mountains which rose ten miles distant in the north. Across this tract the road cut straight as an arrow, following the course of a telephone line of a single wire. The waste had no charm; it stretched eastward and westward on either hand in brown, flat, cheerless monotony to the horizon. A place of desolation, thought Jimmy, a land fit for owls and rattlesnakes and heartless fathers.

Soon the rain ceased, the clouds thinned to masses of vapor through which the sun burst, dissolving them and pouring down a scalding heat. Mud made progress slow; frequent halts were necessary to allow the sweating teams to breathe. Among the clumps of sage

brush, through which wandered here and there a few cattle picking sparse blades of grass, pools of water gleamed like quicksilver. With the dissipation of the clouds the mountains stood forth suddenly, vivid and distinct in the crystal air, imminent as if one had but to put out a hand to touch them—their bases green, their shoulders gloomy with thick pine forests, their rocky crags, bare, gray, difficult and slashed with snow-filled pockets. The range extended at a fairly regular height, except directly in front where towered a single superior crest, pointed, smooth, gleaming white against the sun,—a dominant mountain-lord. This was Silver Peak.

The geological formation of the range was peculiar. In the convulsive cataclysm in which it was created, the uplift had occurred obliquely against the rock strata, so that the tilted ledges lay diagonally upon the face of the mountains. In consequence the drainage was also oblique. The melting snows flowed down slantingly, and while a few stony creek-beds, dry the greater part of the year, meandered across the plain, the rolling river which had its source in the snows of Silver Peak passed into the southeast and left the smooth and level stretch

of country to the west a desert, unwatered and desolate. Many an irrigationist looked upon this open sweep with quickened mind, many an engineer climbed the slopes and studied the surface convolutions, only to shake his head and depart. There were brooks that rattled down gorges, streams that flowed through grassy parks, lakes that lay in high valleys; but always the rock slant lifted a barrier against their utilization as a source of supply for irrigation purposes.

One patient and indefatigable searcher, however, at last discovered a feasible method by which the water could be stored and diverted to the plain. Of the parks that lay upon the lower slopes of the mountain there was one oval in shape and perhaps two miles across its widest part; a small river wound through it lazily, thick flower-strewn meadows spread over its bottom and a narrow gorge permitted the water-course to escape to join the other streams in forming the greater river. By damming this gorge a magnificent reservoir would be had. Measuring each section in the rim which rose between park and plain the engineer discovered a thin, concealed spot in the shell through which a tunnel could be

driven. The problem was solved. Lying as the park did at a considerable elevation above the country which was desired to be irrigated, water could be easily carried from the tunnel far westward along the slopes and delivered upon land miles distant from the river. And now capital was developing the project: one contracting firm building the system of canals, another the tunnel, and to Dukane and Company had fallen the business of constructing the reservoir dam.

To Dukane the road leading thither seemed interminable, though in reality it was only the slow pace of the teams that produced this impression. Occasionally he held converse with the driver. Animosity over their late difference of opinion rankled in the breast of neither, since the matter had been definitely settled.

"Where are we going?" the young fellow asked with detached curiosity.

"To the Silver Peak reservoir dam."

"And who is building it?" Interest was no longer detached.

"Old man Dukane. I've driven wagon somewhere over the country for him these ten years, but I've never seen him."

"I," said Jimmy, "I am his son." And he calmly turned his face, the chief attractions of which were a swollen nose, a black and blue half-closed eye, mud and dried blood, to his companion.

"You are the son of the devil. Hoboes always have rich fathers, to hear 'em tell it. You'll be wanting to borrow money of me pretty soon."

"Not soon, but now."

"Take a few minutes to think it over and make certain," Martin answered ironically.

"I'll explain this mixup to the superintendent."

"You'll work with a shovel, that's what you'll do—and besides he loves a hobo like a snake."

There was food for reflection in this news.

"What's your real name?" Martin presently asked.

"Hempledink,—Ignacio Gustavus Hempledink," Dukane replied sourly, angry at the other's incredulity. "I was born of Swedish parents in the Sahara desert and I am the Siamese twins."

"Hempledink will do. You're one of the

humorous boys, I see; you shall shovel rock till your back cracks."

About five o'clock they reached the mountains. At their base was a small shack town, composed mostly of saloons and enterprises of a similarly evil character, where the workmen of the three camps might loaf, or riot on pay day, or sleep off a debauch in drunken slumber. The buildings were not pretty; long unpainted boxes with strips of rusty black paper fluttering in the wind, standing naked and bare under the hot sun. Behind them lay piles of tin cans and broken bottles, while flies swarmed about the open, screened doors.

Through this town they passed and began the ascent of the hill. Westward a cluster of white dots on a slope showed the location of the canal camp; and already a long, thin, gray scar slanted across the mountain's flank where ran the big ditch in its gradual descent to the plain. A mile above the town they came to the tunnel camp; buildings of the same material as those below placed at the mouth of a ragged hole in the hillside. Just here at the crest of the hill the ledge outcropped, running along the top in a serrated wall and the final climb of the road from the tunnel was steep

though short, but at last the wagons stood upon the summit of the ridge. A magnificent prospect of mountain and plain stretched endlessly into the hazy distance behind; before and below them lay the grassy park which formed the site of the future reservoir. The hill where they rested was a half-moon in shape, like a bent finger jointed to the main body of Silver Peak. The bowl was shallow, not over two hundred feet deep, level bottomed, sheltered, a flower-starred meadow through which the little river looped in curves and bends to vanish at last through the eastern cleft. A ranch-house with out-buildings sat in the middle of the basin and herds fed knee-deep about the meadows, for though the ranch had been purchased by the irrigation company, the owner was to maintain possession until the project was finished. Martin pointed a finger at where, half a mile away, the stream entered the split in the rim. A smooth white spot was just distinguishable in its bottom—the partially constructed dam. Jimmy gazed at it attentively out of his good eye, for was not that gray line what he had been sent to inspect?

Down into the park the wagons went. The descent was easy and brief. At the foot they

met a girl riding a pony, sitting astride in the western fashion and wearing sombrero and gauntlets. As she pulled her mount aside to allow the teaming outfits to pass, she waved a greeting.

"Back again, Mr. Martin?" she cried.

"Safe and sound," he answered heartily.

"Did you bring dad his cigars?"

"By thunder!"—Martin slapped hand on knee—"No."

"Well, he's waiting for them and you'll catch it," she called over her shoulder; and rode on, clattering up the stony hill.

Dukane caught only a fleeting vision of bright eyes, brown hair glinting beneath hat-brim, soft warm cheeks, red lips and white teeth and supple figure; a vision that seemed somehow a part of the sunshine that filled the gleaming cup of the little valley. She had not observed him, or had observed only to pass him over as a horrible ragamuffin.

"You made me forget those cigars—five boxes, his own particular brand," Martin announced, half anxiously; "I was to have picked them up at the depot."

"Well, you picked me up instead and you might turn me over to the gentleman as a substitute."

"You've certainly got your nerve in working order. I'm ashamed to be seen with you."

"Now, don't pull down your bet," Jimmy said; "you chose me, so back your play." And then, "Who is that beauteous damsel?"

"See here," Martin exclaimed, with an oath. "Don't make any fresh talk about her or I'll beat your head in. I'll not have any dirty hobo throwing slurs—"

"Slurs? Why, I never insulted a woman in my life!"

"Don't begin now then."

"I'm not. She is beauteous and she is a damsel; and I've seen a-many. My admiration is genuine, my good patron, though your misplaced indignation does you credit."

"So long as you don't mean anything, all right. She's Enid Crofton, daughter of William Crofton, who owned this ranch and who wanted those cigars."

"Supposing you turn me over to him;—I'm serious."

"He'd boot you out of the valley."

Jimmy considered. "If his boots don't have points—" he suggested mildly. But Martin withered him with a gaze. After a moment he went on, "I think—I think I don't look my prettiest."

"I don't think—I know. You look like seven kinds of a bum."

"Seven, that's something."

"You make me tired, Hinkledink."

"Hinkeldink,—ye gods!"

The road led past the Crofton ranch house, swung to the eastward upon reaching the river and followed it until the dam camp was reached.

This comprised a dozen buildings which crouched some distance before the mouth of the gorge—engine house, machine shop, bunk houses, engineer's quarters, hospital and various other structures. Just here the earth-formation shaped itself from the hill or ridge into a walled ledge of rock that slanted upward steeply to a height of five hundred feet. The vent through which the stream rattled out of the basin was a clean cut rift three hundred yards long, as if the rim had been slashed in twain by some gigantic sword; a split caused by some tremendous earth-strain. Through the exit of the gorge one had a narrow vista of other parks and hills and valleys where this little river, as well as sister streams, still flowed land-locked upon the breast of Silver Peak.

The gorge-bed was full of boulders, with

here and there a thin, spiny pine trunk, which had toppled down from the lip of the fissure, lying among them, and over these the water foamed and boiled and slid glassily in its descent. Even at noonday the sun seldom struck down to the bottom of the chasm; the walls held a damp, odorous dimness, through which one looked upward at the sky as in a well; the noisy talk of the stream continued ever, murmuring between the cliffs with a soft music and sounding above the deep, resonant, unvarying note formed of multitudinous echoes that pulsed like the tones of the heavier pipes of a great organ.

The uncompleted dam stood some distance within the mouth of the gorge and at the narrowest point, the nearest approach of the giant walls. Here the width was but sixty feet from rock to rock. Along each cliff a road had been hewn out of the native ledge standing upward above the line of juncture of dam with wall. When finished the white structure, constructed with an inward curve or arc against the stream, would rise a hundred and fifty feet. Caissons had been sunk in the water, gravel removed, boulders blown to fragments, unstable blocks blasted loose, until the dam's foundation

gripped the solid backbone of the bed-rock thirty feet below the surface of the river. Now that this difficult work was done the dam was beginning to show itself above the stream. Scaffolding and frames covered the low wall as with a netting; spidery cables ran overhead; iron pipes to conduct steam to the hydraulic drills lined either road from the power house and an aerial tram on which great iron buckets traveled to and fro, swung from the mixing plant to the site of the structure. In daytime the spot was a scene of industry; men clung to the cliffs like flies, the cables swayed and shook with transported burdens, while the staccato beat of drills or the reverberating thunder of dynamite blasts throbbed within the canyon.

Work was over for the day when the two drivers pulled their teams to a standstill in the camp.

"Here's a new workman for you, Casey," Martin called out to a man who stood in the door of the mess-house.

Casey walked over and inspected Dukane.

"And where did you find the beauty?" he inquired, in an impersonal manner.

"In the mud. He tried to beat me out of

the price of a meal that I gave him with the generosity I have."

"The miserable creature."

"His name is Hinkeldink—and he'll do his best, of course, to loaf at the work."

"Will he, oh! I'll put him in Mike Callahan's gang, who can wring work out of a dead corpse. Get down and eat your supper, ye dirty spalpeen. Won't work, will ye? Your hands shall bleed and your belly grow sick. Ye shall learn to love both ends of a shovel, and the middle. What we don't know about instructin' hoboos in the duties of mixing white mud, can be well forgotten. Wash your drunken face, eat your supper and draw two blankets at the store, then say your prayers. For ye're to be a hobo no more, but a sweatin' slave with the fear of God and Mike Callahan filling your crawling little soul."

"I'll make Mike Callahan bleat like a nanny-goat if he lays a finger on me. Where's the superintendent?"

"Superintendent! He's not for the likes of you. Get in to your supper, or ye'll have none presently."

The truth of this remark aroused a quick apprehension where threats of what Callahan

would do had failed. After splashing his face in a trough set for that purpose by a barrel of water, and wiping it on one of several grimy towels which hung beside the door of the mess-house, he stepped inside the door. Seventy or eighty men sat eating at two long tables. Immense platters of steaming food weighed the table and from these the men from time to time helped themselves mightily; ravening hunger prevailed, a hunger born of violent or heavy labor, that was fed almost fiercely and that seemed as if it would never be satisfied. Dukane slipped into a seat on one of the benches, glanced at by a few of his neighbors, but remained unremarked by the majority and unwelcomed by any. Occasionally a mutter of talk sounded from some point along one of the tables; always there was a steady click and clatter of knives and forks on dishes, while moved continually the hurrying forms of aproned men bearing fresh supplies of food. After a comprehensive look Dukane sank his identity in a heaping plate of beef, potatoes, beans and bread.

Supper over, he inquired where stood the office, thither made his way. It was in a wide, double building, one of the rough, temporary,

tar paper-covered creations common to camps and erected hastily, one-half serving for engineer headquarters, the other for a company store. The office was shut and locked. On inquiry of a lean, observant individual who picked his teeth in the door of the store and who proved to be the storekeeper, he was informed that the superintendent had ridden away and would not be back until late. Jimmy looked about at the dark mouth of the canyon, at the rim of the hill, at the massive bulk of Silver Peak. Though the sun still shone upon the plain the intervening heights shut off the sunset light and brought an earlier evening. The steady sound of the river, the unstirring peace of the valley, the impressive bulk of the great adjacent mountain, filled him with a sudden sense of loneliness and helplessness. Hope deferred made his heart sick; security appeared for a time withdrawn; Fate had tricked him and after all he would have to sleep in one of the bunk houses with dirty laborers. With a sigh he drew an allotment of two blankets and turned back.

"Casey told me you'd be along," said the storekeeper. "You're down already in his time book for Callahan's gang." And he

grinned with the appreciation which knowledge of that foreman's character and record permitted.

There were two bunk houses, one for the hard-rock men, the carpenters, machinists and those who were howsoever lifted out of the ordinary ruck by skilled knowledge and "big pay," and one considerably larger for the common laborers, shovelers, teamsters, and all the rest of the two-dollar-a-day-and-board herd. Dukane had no trouble in finding an empty bunk in the long barracks-like building, for the camp, as Martin had stated, found it difficult to procure workmen and more difficult to keep them. Men came, stayed a week or two, then with money in pocket drifted away. Dukane's appearance at the dam, therefore, was scarcely noted; he was taken for granted as one of the dozens who came and went. In the darkness about him when at last he retired, lay stertorous-breathing figures; a light breeze blew in the open door, yet the air was heavy with the mingled odor of tar-paper, woolen blankets and sweat-damped human bodies; and in the hollow of his ears there sounded the steady, insistent voice of the river. A sense of the hugeness of the work going on here in an out of the

way corner, the sternness of the grapple which these men who toiled by daylight and flung themselves down in sleep at dark had with the stubborn rock,—only one of a score of such conflicts carried on in the name of concrete—impressed him with a certain new and broad respect for Dukane and Company. It was the nearest he had ever come to its hidden, thumping heart, and the pulsations stirred him indescribably, though not yet with any definite desire, particularly the humble desire to swing a shovel.

Next morning he arose a new youth, refreshed, buoyant, cheerful. He would make an explanation to the superintending engineer, procure some decent clothes, cash a check, make an inspection—he would really make as good an inspection as an uninformed fellow could do—and hie himself back to New York. With his affairs thus resolved and the world put in order, he made his way to breakfast with a light heart.

“And you’re the new felly who told Casey you’d make me bleat like a nanny-goat,”—a voice addressed him as he stepped forth after eating into the morning sunlight that shot through the gorge.

Half a dozen men stood in a group: two booted chaps, evidently engineers, Casey, Martin, and finally a short, dark, frowning, uneasy man wearing a brown mustache, all of whom had been laughing at some remark. The one who spoke was a large, bull-shouldered individual with eyebrows thick as a finger, thick lips, and face burnt fiery red from exposure; he towered over Dukane a full foot. The youth was for an instant almost awed by the bulk of the man—almost but not quite.

"You're a very, very big man, Mr. Callahan," said he, propitiatingly. "I withdraw my statement; I could not do it."

"You impudent scarecrow, get down to the mixer and grab a shovel."

"Me? Oh, no! I want to see the chief, whoever he is."

"I'll—" Callahan began angrily, but was interrupted by the man with the mustache.

"I'm in charge here; what do you want?"

"I'm Jim Dukane."

"Martin just told us that joke. Don't carry it too far, if you don't want to be fired on the spot." He looked scornfully at the boy's battered face. "You've been on a spree—work will do you good."

"But I'm telling the truth!"

"I know—I know. Every tramp who drifts in here could spin a tale if he thought to raise a dollar by it to buy booze. Take him along, Callahan."

Jimmy's eyes flashed—or rather his one eye.

"Turn me down, do you, you—"

But Callahan's iron hand descended upon his shoulder and dragged him away, still shouting threats and dire prophecies.

"You'll work till your back is broken in three places," said the foreman. Still retaining his grasp upon Dukane, he placed a shovel in his hands.

Tears of rage rose in Jimmy's eyes; he could have smitten the superintendent into a gray mass which would not be distinguishable from concrete, but the iron hand pressed him steadily towards a pile of crushed stone. Nevertheless, he was able to cast many imprecations at the chief who heard them not and predict numerous strange and painful things which should happen to him, for Callahan could not, at least, check his tongue.

Shoveling crushed stone is not an exciting business, as convicts and Jimmy could inform you—and for all practical purposes Jimmy

might as well have been a convict wearing a ball and chain. Callahan devoted to him special and wary attention in addition to much advice. There were three other men laboring at the pile; occasionally they leaned upon their shovels to rest—there was no rest allowed Dukane. The work palled on his soul and blistered his hands. The mixer turned in eccentric revolutions upon its diagonal axis, but moved under no such heat of applied force as he did under the propelling spirit of the omnipotent foreman. At noon his back was broken in the three places promised by Callahan, by evening the pieces were infragiated into little detached fragments like the stone he shoveled. It was a Jimmy Dukane of one hundred years old who tottered up to the washing trough at supper time with hands seared, body bowed, knees shaking; but an indomitable spirit still ruled in him; a fierce and abiding thirst for revenge flamed in his breast, and the things that his tongue had never all day ceased to deliver to Callahan regarding that foreman and the superintendent won warm though silent admiration from the steel-nerved satrap. Surely, Jimmy thought that night as he turned his weary, battered face up

to the ceiling in the darkness of the bunk house, surely he was one hundred years old.

Callahan confided to Casey, the timekeeper, and Martin that Hemple was, judging by the speech of him, unquestionably a son of the devil.

CHAPTER III

DUKANE IN FETTERS

DUKANE had arrived on a Thursday evening; by Saturday night he had earned four dollars. When he filed up to the store with the other workmen, experiencing a certain proud distinction similar to that felt by a school laggard who has unexpectedly won a reward of merit, he received what he termed "a punch in the solar plexus"; there was no check for him, and instead he found that his store account of six dollars and ten cents for blankets and a sack of Durham tobacco was credited with the amount. Thereupon he returned to the bunk house profoundly respectful of the Dukane company's business methods.

"I must buy clothes, that's a fact," he mused, "but at this rate I'll be owing a month's pay by next week. I'm slipping into an abyss of debt with father far across the sea. Come ye comrades, chant a chorus; Prometheus bound to the rock!"

He had heard vaguely of peonage, of enforced labor in southern pineries and mines. To his heated imagination, in the first moment of shock, when his earnings were willy-nilly withheld from him and when he had thought to finger a check for four round dollars, it seemed as if he were indeed robbed. Peonage was in force here at Silver Peak, naked, outrageous, unashamed; Mexico had nothing like it; next they would be using whips; and Dukane and Company was an inhuman monster to take four dollars from a poor, down-trodden, body-racked working man. All the indignation of a beer-hall orator stirred in his breast, and on its surface rose all the accompanying foam of eloquence, so that he harangued a group of laborers before the bunk house door in socialistic language, most of whom laughed, all of whom lent a curious ear. When he ran out of breath he sat down and rolled a cigarette and had a glow of satisfaction. For was he not truly one of the down-trodden? He knew their sorrows and sufferings; capitalists were cormorants; and now and forever afterward he would vote the workingman's ticket.

"It's not their holdin' out our time for stuff we draw at the store—that's all right," said

one, "it's their graft and double prices. Take your shoddy blankets, for instance, and a bag of tobacco. Six dollars for one and ten cents for the other, when you can buy 'em anywhere for half of that. Ten cents for a little nickel bag of smokin', what a man's got to have like food; and two dollars for a rotten pair of overalls that cost a dollar anywhere else under the sun. Graftin'—graftin'; that's it—top to bottom, all the way round, all the way through, Pennick at the store, the chief in the office."

"The chief," said Jimmy, picking up his ears.

"Sure, on the cement. Didn't Pat Gorham, who used to drive team, tell me before he left that there was more bags paid for than came into camp? Sure, there's graftin'."

"But that can't be. The receipts all along the line would show it up."

"Well, it's none of my business—and I'm not sayin' it's so," said the man, on a sudden alarmed lest he had uttered too great treason against the chief. "All I know is what Pat Gorham said; maybe he lied."

The talk of graft did not end with the man's declaration of what Pat Gorham had vouchsafed. During the next few days, the words

struck his ears more than once; and it was not an open subject of discussion, on the contrary it was a closed one, jestingly hinted at, casually alluded to, indifferently accepted as a common custom in any business. The workmen were all of the flotsam and jetsam of industry, turning their hand to any labor or to whatever project necessity forced them; they were cynical with the rough cynicism born of divers hard circumstances in many States and under numerous employers; and their knowledge was as a garment made out of shreds and patches. The core of it was that every man was pursuing the elusive dollar, and the easier it was captured the better; graft was a regular thing anywhere, sure! Hence the topic sifted through their talk in a steady undercurrent, impersonally, regularly, jocosely, as did the subjects of work, food, pay, accidents, weather and liquor.

"If there is graft, does the governor know it?" meditated Jimmy, leaning upon his shovel—for now the hitherto inexorable Callahan relaxed his iron discipline so far as to permit him occasional moments of rest. Dukane junior was well aware that there were many things concerning his father of which he knew naught;

indeed, with the difference of opinion which had existed between them as to Jimmy himself the youth had, so far as he could, studiously avoided all but conventional family relations with Dukane senior. "But dad is square and no grafter, I know that—nor is the company, either. I'll bet my week's pay it's this shifty superintendent who's at the bottom of it. I will look into the matter."

That, however, was an investigation not unattended by difficulties. Ten hours of the day were occupied with the shovel, three with meals, and nine with sleep. The slim remainder of time did not greatly impress him as affording opportunity for a private examination. Besides, he was only an atom in the camp, an atom with a black eye and generally disreputable appearance; all he could do for the present was to listen to the men's gossip and trust to pick up what miscellaneous bits of information came his way. Then a dark and cunning scheme entered his curly head. Pat Gorham had been a teamster and learned something; thither then led his road. He began of evenings to cultivate Miller, consulting him on the nature of horses, on mending harness, loading wagons; Miller

spoke out of a full knowledge when he perceived that he had a willing listener.

"I was born to be a teamster," Jimmy said at last; "besides, one earns two-fifty a day."

Miller laughed. "You couldn't tell a trace from a halter."

This was true, but Jimmy denied it, and swore by all the gods that he could handle a six-horse team with the skill and aplomb of a chariot driver. Moreover he informed Miller that if the latter, as boss teamster, did not give him a wagon to drive, the hostilities suspended at Melton would be renewed. Miller once more laughed, for he was highly amused at the boy and answered that he would see about it.

But events were shaping themselves to a crisis in young Dukane's affairs: he got into the chief's black books.

Corbetson was a medium-sized, not a confidence-inspiring man out of the Salt Lake office. He had a manner betokening secretiveness; responsibility sat uneasily upon him; and he might have been any one of the thousand nervous, harassed men whom one sees in cities, wearing a close cropped mustache, eye-glasses, and a wrinkle in the forehead. About forty years of age, he had served in the employ of the

Salt Lake office for ten years, quietly, competently, and as one of the under men who made up a cog in that particular wheel of the machine. Despite silent acquiescence in his work, in the routine in which he worked apparently with unquestioning loyalty, there nevertheless was a live canker in the fruit of his service. Secretly his soul fretted—it fed on what seemed studied and deliberate neglect of his abilities; other men went up, but he remained tracing maps or figuring estimates. That he received no credit for his suggestions and none of the profits that accrued from his labor bit like acid into his brain. His salary was an insult; he read magazine articles of captains of industry, their wealth, their daring enterprises, discovering that money was the solution of the conquest of mankind; nights he figured under the lamp of his lone room (for he was unmarried) what could be accomplished with this hypothetical amount or that hypothetical amount, resolving that he also should be rich. Did he not know men in his own city who had made fortunes out of contracts? Oh, if he had but the chance! So he fretted and schemed and figured, distilling hatred drop by drop in his heart for Dukane and Company which had crushed him.

And then at last, all unexpectedly, he was transferred to the district managed by the San Francisco office and put in charge of the construction of Silver Peak Reservoir Dam. Even then he had been the second choice, for the Company was at the moment loaded with projects and in consequence new men had to be lifted up to places of responsibility. Now he had gained something; but the habit of cavil was fixed in him—and he had according to his viewpoint been granted but a miserable increase in wages for extraordinary services. In anger, therefore, he cast his eyes around him, remembering that after all men in positions of importance never grow rich on salaries but with money picked up quietly in opportunities afforded by their offices. There were a thousand examples: aldermen in cities, legislators in State Houses, directors watering railroads by millions. Long before he came to Silver Peak he had arrived at the state of mind when the man with money represented absolute success. And he was forty—he must strike out. A plan came into his mind, was rejected, returned, again rejected, at last dallied with, considered, seized. It would make him money; and why, he thought fiercely, should Dukane

and Company strip him of the profit his brain rightly deserved? Was it not he, Corbetson, who was building the dam? Then, clenching his hand, he took advantage of the sixty days allowed him before the work on the dam began to set the scheme in operation. But thereafter he became very uneasy indeed, for now he had two responsibilities, the day responsibility of the work, the night responsibility of secrecy, and added to these was a third anxiety which will presently appear.

That the hobo who had arrived in camp, battered, dirty, ragged and disreputable, was Dukane junior, never entered his restless thoughts. When Martin related the fellow's nonsense and pointed him out, and when he heard Jimmy's declaration, he had instantly dismissed the supposed pretension, being occupied with graver matters. And meanwhile Jimmy shoveled crushed rock. The manner in which the interests of Corbetson, who was the top of the camp, and Dukane, who was the very bottom, chanced to conflict, befell thus: On the tenth day of his slavery Dukane heard a deep roar of pain from Callahan. With a grinding jar the machinery of the mixer came to a stop as the power was cut off. The foreman, making an

examination of a part of the complex mass of iron and wheels, had had his hand caught in a cog and his arm crushed to the elbow. It was a sickening thing to look at. Pain and the shock sucked the man's face white as paper. The workmen gazed at him aghast, helpless, stupid, while Callahan leaned against the wheels which had mangled his limb, his great frame shuddering with agony.

"For God's sake!" he whispered huskily. "For God's sake, cut my arm off!"

The operator and Dukane both sprang to assist him, themselves pale and horror-stricken, and caught him as he wavered; then half carrying him, they bore him up to the little building in which the camp doctor lived. Half an hour later the arm was off at the elbow and Callahan, still unconscious from chloroform, lay in one of the white beds of the hospital ward. Jimmy Austin, the mixing-machine operator, and Corbetson, had assisted in the grim business of the surgery.

Then they returned to the mixer.

"You lazy swine, get to your shovels," Dukane shouted, as the great iron bowl of the machine once more began to rumble and revolve.

Excitement of the late accident still ran in his veins; and besides, how could these ignorant laborers work without a boss? He, Jimmy Dukane, by his ten days' experience and natural hatred for shoveling, was eminently fitted to fill the position of foreman. He seized a broken shovel handle and ran at his late companions, demanding to know if they would work or would not work, and whanged one sullen Austrian over the back to give point to his question.

"You need a boss, or you'd stand loafing all day on your shovels. Consider me the first son and heir of Callahan," he answered, and walked insolently among them.

"What are you doing here?" the chief asked, when he presently arrived.

"I have taken Callahan's place," Jimmy answered modestly.

"And who told you to do it, you damned hobo?"

Corbetson had been shaken by Callahan's accident. The sight of blood made him sick, and also the thought of losing one of his best men left him dispirited, fretful and on edge, quick to take offence.

"Nobody appointed me, that's a fact."

"Well, you shall understand that I run things here."

"Certainly, sir. But these beggars were kicking their toes doing nothing; they need an overseer—here I am." And turning, he beheld the men grinning maliciously. "Here you!" he shouted, and banged the Austrian across the shoulders again. "That's all they need," he explained to the chief.

Corbetson frowned and hesitated. Need it they did, but this impudent upstart had usurped authority—and the chief was very jealous of his authority. He looked about uneasily; responsibility weighed on him, and he always hated, shrank from a clash of wills.

"Keep them at it then," he growled.

For after all a boss was necessary, and if not this fellow it would be some other; so he walked away, uncertain in his own mind, feeling that he had been overmatched, at once relieved that a decision had been reached and resentful that Hemplendink, or whatever his name might be, had not been more subservient. A mental note, however, he penciled in his mind to suppress the young blackguard at the first opportunity and show him his rightful place.

Dukane enforced his newly acquired power

with vigor; authority rejoiced his soul and the broken shovel handle became the truncheon of his office. In addition to seeing that the gang shoveled and meanwhile maintained a proper respect, he had time for observation of the reservoir work at large. Crushed stone no longer comprised his range of vision; he had to watch the machine, of which he knew nothing whatever, and see that stone and cement and water went into the mixer in proper proportions. Where he was most ignorant, he wore an air of greatest wisdom, and by asking adroit questions of the operator, of Casey, and of others he presently knew what was necessary to be known.

"Ye've risen in the world, my foine black-bird," said the timekeeper, who, hearing of his promotion, had gone incredulously to the chief, only to have the fact confirmed.

"It's but the first step," Dukane answered masterfully, "the rest will come fast."

"Ye're an impudent, black-hearted usurper and will presently be kicked out of camp. Two and a half a day is what ye now draw, worse luck. Speak to me no more."

Casey, however, condescended to give him information, for which Dukane's empty mind,

now that it labored under responsibility, had grown hungry. To many questions, nevertheless, the foreman could give no answer, and remarked that Hemple was a voracious young cormorant with no manners; if he wanted to know this and know that, why didn't he ask the chief—a timekeeper was not an encyclopedia. Wherefore one day Corbetson and an assistant engineer named Satterfield, a tall, stooped, hard working man, having chanced to halt a little way off from the mixer where they stood in consultation, he silently drew near to their shoulders. They were speaking of lumber.

"Why do you not transport it to the dam in a sling on the aerial cable, instead of handling it half a dozen times?" he said, entering the conversation unannounced, but with the virtuous feeling that he offered valuable counsel. "What you need is more system."

They looked around in astonishment. Then blackness settled like a thunder-cloud on the face of the chief.

"What are you doing here? Get back to your work!" he exclaimed.

"But that's a fact—I see a good many places where system is lacking."

Corbetson broke into a vicious curse, the assistant smiled satirically; the idea of a common laborer assuming to pass judgment upon the methods of work in operation stung the one and amused the other.

"There's something in the suggestion," the latter however admitted.

The assistant engineer therefore came in for the black look, for this was lending, as it were, succor to the enemy. The vanity of the chief was cut to the quick, all the deeper that in his secret heart he knew his system was not flawless. Somehow, now that everything was in his own hands to mould and make, his mind lacked that quick analysis, that ready expedient, which it had seemed to possess when he sat in the company office at Salt Lake and flattered himself on how he would have improved this man's or that one's actual work; and what was worse he suspected that his two assistants knew his deficiencies, though they offered no criticism, and only made suggestions when requested. His attitude was not at any time one to encourage intimacy on the part of those beneath him. To have then an impudent, villainous looking workman break in upon him as an equal was more than he could tolerate.

"Get back to your work, or get your time, one or the other," he ordered.

Jimmy regarded him narrowly. The virtue of his offering was ignored and he thereupon returned to the mixer and expressed his resentment upon the back of the Austrian shirker, who had listened and now grinned at him with unconcealed delight.

"You vas got de throw-down," the latter triumphed.

"You vas got de whacker," hissed Jimmy, thumping him with his truncheon.

"I vill burn dat stick in a fire," was the man's ferocious threat as he fingered his bruised ribs.

This Austrian was one of the score of nationalities—Irish, Mexican, Slav, Greek, Swede and many others—represented in the dam camp, but they were in the minority; American workmen predominated. All were of a rough, animal type, knowing naught but hard, exhausting labor; men whose bodies were stiffened by toil, who had nothing to look forward to but pay-day and a possible debauch. In the other and smaller bunk-house the workmen were superior; they possessed a certain independent pride born of their skill, higher wages, competence and exclusiveness. But Jimmy

pronounced his own companions "cattle," and he experienced a thousand profound emotions—disgust, anger, pity, sympathy, despair, at their credulity, or ignorance, or habits, or helplessness, or blind struggles of soul against they knew not what. Man in unformed, unquickened, impotent mass he had never before seen; man driven to hopeless toil by the whips of miserable existence; man whose sole consideration was body and whom necessity gave no time for anything else. He was now in contact with him, of him; and this strange new man gave Jimmy much food for thought.

Of most of the men he made friends, of some enemies. There was a little bent fellow from Ohio, who had a bunk next to him and who, though bearing the misfortune of a club foot, was a cheerful soul. He had two teeth out in front, which gave him an idiotic grin, and his ears were large, standing wide upon his head; he, however, was a steady and good workman, a bucket handler on the dam, who did not go roaring off to Tunneltown as did most on Saturday nights.

"I'm saving my money," he informed Dukane, "to buy a piece of that irrigated land out yonder. Got about four hundred dollars put

away out of the last three years' work. A farm would just suit me, then there'd be no more bein' shipped around by employment bureaus, no more bunk-house. Give me a piece of ground with alfalfa blossoming on it, and fruit trees, and a cow or two, and a wife to sit on the porch with me evenin's, that's all." And he breathed a sign of content, with a rapt smile at the vision.

"That would suit me also, Hop Spencer," Jimmy asseverated, "I've had too much concrete—I too long for a fat, spotted, philosophical cow. But I'm getting deeper into the company's debt day by day for overalls, shoes and so on. I'm doomed—slowly strangling in its grip. Pretty soon there'll be only my head sticking above the white mud."

Spencer giggled. Hempledink, he said, always talked "so desperate-like" it made him laugh.

It was on account of his acquaintance with this merry little cripple and because of the friendship which grew up between them that he won the hostility of one Lantry, a brutal bully of a man, a hard drinker when he had money, a bearded, inflamed laborer, who sought to impose his despotic rule upon the bunk-

house. The fellow had taken of late to amusing himself with Spencer, who in the beginning had resented some rough jest at his expense; now the cripple became the victim of deliberate and systematic persecution on the part of Lantry—little meannesses that stung, rough “horse play,” indecent quips and vile epithets, over which Lantry would roar with laughter, together with half a dozen others of his kind. The decenter men scowled, but as each man must by the standards which prevail in camps, fight his own fight and the weaker suffer, they remained silent.

“This fun has gone far enough,” Dukane remarked briskly one evening when he found Spencer wiping a gory nose which had been smacked in one of Lantry’s playful cuffs. “We’ll teach this rude person that he must have manners; let us light our tobacco and think of many painful things we can provide for him.” Whereupon he pulled out his blackened clay pipe with broken-off stem and sat himself down by Hop Spencer.

The upshot of putting their heads together was a surprise for Lantry when next he approached that quarter for diversion. A white chalk mark was drawn around the bunks of the

pair. Dukane pointed a finger at it and informed the bully that if he crossed that dead-line there would be war that would make Gettysburg look like a slap on the wrist. He and Spencer each meanwhile grasped a weapon, namely, a wagon-wheel spoke—a sound, solid, skull-smashing, rib-cracking, respect-inspiring instrument of defence.

“What have you got to do with this, you grease-fed kid?” Lantry roared, with an extreme expansion of temper.

“Step over that line and see,” Jimmy invited, testing his club as a batsman balances his bat before an opposing pitcher. “We have mixed medicine, we have danced a war-dance, we have killed a pig and drunk of its blood, and we are now blood-brothers. Come into our lodge and get your skin nailed to a post.”

“Come on, come on, you bully!” Spencer squealed, with a sudden new ardor.

By this time the room had crowded round. A dozen voices offered encouragement, shouted to “go it boys” and stick up for their rights. Out-numbered and out-faced, Lantry glared about, uttered a curse and retired threatening dire punishments.

“The first victory is ours,” Jimmy remarked,

shoving his club under his pillow, "but we'll have to march together hereafter, Hop, two and two, like the animals entering the Ark."

Time passed until Dukane had been in Silver Peak Basin three weeks. He swelled with food, knowledge of concrete and independence. He was very confident that he could build a dam himself, with perhaps the help of a surveyor. Day by day he taught his gang their duty to the mixer; he visited Callahan in the little hospital and told him tales of the dam and of many other things until that now one-armed ex-foreman awaited his coming as a child longs for its mother. To his listener Jimmy denounced the system of the camp—rock-crushing, grinding, transporting, dumping, carpentering, blasting, building—until Callahan's eyes twinkled.

"It's very wise you've grown in a fortnight," said he.

"So I have—there is nothing more for me to learn," was the brazen rejoinder.

"What it's taken the rest of us poor devils, chief, assistant, down to Casey and me, years to learn."

"That shows that I'm an unusual man."

"You're a damned swelled-up kid. Next

thing you'll be driving off the whole camp and buildin' the dam with just your own two little hands."

"I would need a shoveler perhaps."

Many things he did not know about the work, but he did not know that he knew not. Ideas surged and overflowed in his mind—now if he were running things! He one day button-holed the assistant-engineer with whom the chief had been talking on the occasion when he had offered his suggestion about moving lumber along the cable in slings.

"What's your name?" he inquired, keeping forefinger firmly hooked in the other's button-hole.

In astonishment the stooped, studious engineer answered that it was Satterfield.

"All right. Now, Satterfield, why don't you fellows who're trying to build this dam use steel frames for the molds instead of lumber. Any person with his eyes open would know that they would be twice as convenient."

"Convenient possibly, but how about the cost? Do you know that such frames as you mention would be expensive to manufacture, transport, erect, besides being a dead loss when the work was finished? And meanwhile, my

young friend, kindly remove your finger from my lapel."

But Dukane persisted.

"There are a lot of things that you chaps don't handle right—" he began.

Satterfield, however, had neither time nor disposition to tolerate further impertinence from the youth. He firmly removed Jimmy's finger, turned about without speech and walked away.

"Perhaps I addressed him too abruptly," Dukane soliloquized.

His second Sunday he spent in scrambling over the dam, peeking into the flood-tunnels, examining the concrete frames and staring up at the towering cranes. Finally he stepped forth upon a scaffolding that clung to the face of the dam, where after a time he sat down to smoke and reflect. Below him a considerable distance the stream escaped from a gate, rushing in foam and spume among boulders, like a width of tossing white lace, until it disappeared behind a protruding ledge of rock; over him reared pine crested cliffs; in his ears was the steady, persistent, murmurous roar of sound which echoed between the walls.

The scaffolding on which he had posted him-

self ran along the top of the dam, but now as he sat swinging his feet over the gulf, his head was below the wall and he was invisible to anyone who stood a pace or two back from the edge. Owing to this circumstance he became an eavesdropper, at first inadvertent, then deliberate, of a conversation which partook of a more or less confidential character. At the speaker's first utterance he was about to announce himself with a loud "ahem!" or some similar warning in the conventional form that is employed in apprising others of one's presence, when his thoughts took another angle. Was he not here to learn all he could about the dam? And the subject being discussed by the unseen persons certainly applied to the dam. Jimmy perceived his duty. He would get by stealth what he could get in no other way, even if the method hardly comported with what is popularly supposed to be the mode of a gentleman, but only of a shoveler—with which sophistry he stretched his ears to their longest.

The two assistant-engineers who had stopped near him were the talkers.

"Mighty peculiar," said Leschelles, the freckled-faced young fellow.

"Peculiar is not strong enough—extraordi-

nary's the word," the other, Satterfield, said slowly. "Did you ever see a dam built in such a fashion before?"

"No, can't say that I have. But then, I've not seen a tremendous lot of them, you know."

"You don't have to see them, for you know the theory."

"Yes."

Silence followed for a time.

"It's a box, or will be, filled with rubbish," Satterfield went on.

"Must have struck the office as a queer thing. Who do you suppose could have planned such a mess? Certainly no one who knew anything about strains. Maybe it will hold awhile, but some day when there's a cloud-burst or any rush of water, it'll crumple up like cardboard."

"That's it, and people will want to know then who built it."

"That's the deuce of it," rejoined the younger, in an uncomfortable tone. "Dukane will have to bear the disagreeable responsibility and through the Company the rest of us. What strikes me as more extraordinary even than the dam is that the Company should undertake a job they knew was rotten."

"Money's a big incentive nowadays."

"Old Man Dukane has a reputation for honest work. It will be a big sweep when she goes—bondholders ruined, farmers without water, oh, it's bad! I wish I were somewhere else."

Satterfield evidently stood a time in thought. At last he said: "I've taken it up with the chief two or three times, but he's pretty short. 'Specifications are specifications,' he stated, 'and it isn't our business to question them if they constitute the kind of dam the builders want.' And there are the specifications; you are familiar with them."

"Familiar—I'm sick of them! Such a botch is enough to make anybody sick. I've half a notion to ask the inspector when he comes round what under heaven those capitalists mean by throwing together such a flimsy affair."

"That is hardly our business, you know," Satterfield suggested.

Dukane sat with growing eyes. One thing he knew, if he did not know anything else, and that was the stiff pride his father took in the security, the solidarity of the Company's concrete construction. If the works broke, his heart would break with them.

"What can we do then?" Leschelles inquired.

Jimmy could imagine the tall, stooped, elder man wiping his glasses in perplexity.

"I don't know," he admitted, in the end. "Well, let's go back to the house—or over to Miss Enid's or somewhere, and not let this project haunt us before the deed as well as after."

One round eye above the edge of the parapet, the eavesdropper watched their figures depart, pass off upon the road and descend to the camp. Then he sprang up on the dam to investigate. Strange he had never noticed the thing before, or possibly it was because he did not yet know quite all that was to be known about the construction of dams. But it was a fact that between the walls lay loose rubble of stone. In one place a coating of concrete faced it over thinly.

"Shoddy, very shoddy," the youth remarked aloud. "It's a good thing I'm on the job."

CHAPTER IV

THE RESULT OF A SHOT

AS the noon whistle blew Dukane straightened from the mixing machine which he had been examining for a defect and flung a glance about. A girl on horseback, the same girl whom he had seen for an instant passing on the afternoon of his coming to Silver Peak Basin, was riding on the opposite side of the river. Her pony paced slowly along the road and she gazed with mild interest at the dam, then with a whinny her mount suddenly pulled its head in the direction of the stream. So she permitted the animal to turn aside and drink. It was a pretty picture. The pony stood with forefeet in the water, head lowered. Behind the rider the reddish-black rock towered high; the river flowed in swift, glancing light, curving and undulating smoothly over stones, or flashing into myriad diamonds; and she sat motionless, meditative, a golden kerchief about her neck, look-

ing down at the current. Jimmy barely noted that his men had gone, that the mixer was silent, that the workmen were streaming down from the dam on the south bank and moving to dinner.

When the pony had satisfied its thirst it scrambled up the stones and back upon the road, to continue an ascent of the incline. He sighed; he felt himself all at once swept by immense desolation, by sad tenderness. If he had been James Dukane, junior, he could have found a way to make the acquaintance of this lovely girl; he would perhaps have been at this very minute riding by her side. But he was only Hemple, who carried one eye yet black-and-blue and a cut on his forehead. Again he sighed, this time profoundly. He was an unfortunate youth; fate had indeed buffeted him cruelly. A third sigh emanated from the same source whence had arisen the others—his dusty bosom. And he yearningly watched the girl and pony as they reached the end of the road over the dam. She pushed her timorous mount close up to the yawning chasm and so, poised like a sculptured figure, sat looking down unafraid into the depths.

Noon—the noon shot! A thrill of fear ran

through Jimmy, for it was always but a few minutes after the whistle, when the workmen were withdrawn, that the charges planted in the rough sides of the walls were fired. For a week the dynamiters had been shooting away the cliff beside her. A wild yell burst from his lips, he bounded toward the little footbridge which spanned the stream as if he had been attached to and galvanized by the wire which conveyed the detonating current of those self-same dynamite charges. His feet skimmed the earth, his legs flew, his teeth set. Up the inclining road he sped. As he neared the spot where she sat in blissful ignorance, he cast one frantic look over his shoulder, as if somehow he could in that way measure the brief interval which remained. Workmen had seen him; he heard a shout from the camp. One man was running towards the power-plant. With fierce face in which an empurpled eye glared demon-like, he sprang to the pony and forced it back from the brink, then began dragging it down the road.

The pony had feelings and ideas of propriety. A rude person had disturbed its contemplation, therefore it attempted to sit down upon its haunches. The girl screamed.

"Come, for Heaven's sake, come!" he cried.

"Let me go, let me go!" she shrieked vigorously, eyes darting flames.

"I won't—you'll be killed," he shouted, enraged.

And taking a quick step he caught her round the waist, dragged her struggling from the saddle and bore her in tumultuous triumph around a jut of rock.

Boom! went a shot. A cloud of dust and stones sprayed up in a geyser against the cliff wall and out over the chasm. A piece of rock as large as a man's head rolled to their very feet. *Boom—boom—boom!* they exploded, one after another. The pony, struck on the hind quarters by a flying fragment, tore madly past them, while the roll of the dynamite thunder went thumping and bumping down the gorge.

To Dukane the situation had nothing of the romantic in it. Dust, a wild turmoil in his arms, and a deep burning scratch on his cheek seemed to comprise the chief elements of the event so far as he was concerned. He regarded his companion and reached for his blue bandana handkerchief, for blood was dripping from his chin. In every affair in which he was

engaged, he reflected, he suffered with singular fatality upon the face. As for the girl whom he had rescued, she was a vixen.

"How dare you!" she cried, drawing back and tugging desperately at her gauntlets.

"I'll never dare again," he replied shortly. "Still it seemed easier than going down and picking you up out of the river."

"You dreadful creature! When Tom might have jumped and dashed me to death!"

"Or backed up and sat down with you inside the wall."

"But to pull me off!"

"Leisurely discussion would of course have been more gallant," said he, ironically.

"I thought you some villain—you're not?"

"No, Miss, only an honest workingman disguised as one."

"You don't talk like either."

Jimmy paused, patted his cheek with his handkerchief, then gazed at it contemplatively.

"My good heart's blood it is," said he.

She came a step nearer.

"Did I do that?"

"No, indeed, it was some fluttering angel."

"Nonsense, I made that scratch."

He showed one of his flashing smiles. "It's

a good one of its kind. Now you had best go back. Tommy, if that's his name, is standing at the foot of the hill casting reproachful glances at you."

She started to go, then stopped. For Jimmy was accompanying her, walking quite at home by her side.

"Thank you, very much, for your service," she said stiffly and dismissingly. "I want you to feel that I am grateful—and sorry for the scratch."

"It's merely one of my collection. I'll catch Tommy for you."

Now was the young lady of the bright eyes and lovely face visibly embarrassed. In her mind an immense social gulf, wide and deep as the chasm from which she had just been drawn back, yawned between her and the camp laborers; she had ignored the very existence of the common men, recognizing only the boss driver, the storekeeper, doctor, the superintendent, and his two assistants, yet what could she say to this young laborer; and as they proceeded she imagined what her father's astonishment would have been—he a relic of the proud South—had he observed them together. Relief, then amusement, took possession of her, for she per-

ceived that the young fellow only meant to convey courtesy. Imagine then how immediately her mind received a shock.

"Won't you come and be rescued every day?" he asked.

A quizzical wrinkle marked her brow; finally she bubbled into laughter. He was gazing at her with inquiring, sparkling, mischievous eyes. Really he was not bad looking, though sadly marred—curly black hair, white teeth, clear brown skin and round boyish head, so round a head it seemed about to pop open like a steam-filled apple. Indeed, he was only a boy, though a saucy one.

"The idea! That would be rather exhausting, to go through this day after day."

"We could have the scene put on as a thriller for moving picture shows." And as he caught the pony's head, "Here is Pegasus who would have flown away with you."

"Pegasus, where did you ever hear that name?" she asked, surprised.

Jimmy beamed with fond recollection: "I rode Pegasus through a university and was often bucked off."

Enid Crofton stared at him with new-kindled interest.

"You a university man!"

"I have that noble honor," Dukane rejoined, sweeping the ground with his punctured hat in an elaborate bow. "Appearances are against the belief. But I am so stuffed with knowledge that I feel like a sausage. Listen, here is poetry that a Literature professor once made me memorize for my sins:

'And Enid heard the clashing of his fall,
Suddenly came, and at his side all pale
Dismounting loosed the fastenings of his arms,
Nor let her true hand falter, nor blue eye
Moisten, till she had lighted on his wound,
And tearing off her veil of faded silk
Had bared her forehead to the blistering sun
And swathed the hurt that drained her dear lord's life.' "

Amazed, the girl listened to him mouth the rolling lines. Whether she would presently lapse into a hysteria of shrieks of laughter she could not guess; the ridiculousness of it, the prodigious impudence stupefied her and stirred her wonder. To have quoted so neatly the passage of Tennyson's *Idylls*! She stood struggling, finally mastered her emotion and averting her face, swung into the saddle.

He clutched the bridle, wrapped his fingers in it firmly.

"Am I never to see you again?" he cried.

"Why, you may see me riding around the valley any day."

Dukane shook the bridle with impetuous fervor, until Tommy, the pony, snapped at him in high displeasure.

"The valley! I don't want merely to see you, I want to talk to you."

She gazed down at him. A smile crept upon her lips; truly he was just a boy, not much older than herself. What a disreputable, charming vagabond he was! He had broken the monotony of her tranquil life, flashed like a bright beam across the dull existence of Silver Peak Basin. If—but what would her father say!

Jimmy slowly let go the bridle and stepped back.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Crofton," said he slowly.

She noted a wistful loneliness in his eyes, and yielded. "There's our house yonder," she pointed a finger. "Father would be glad, I'm sure, to thank you for saving me from a possible accident."

The sound of feet hurrying up the stony bank of the stream came to their ears; Dukane

glanced about with a face full of annoyance. It was the chief engineer, deuce take the chief! He had been informed of Enid Crofton's misadventure and was hurrying to assure himself that no harm had touched her person.

"I'm glad you're safe," he exclaimed. "Was this the fellow who helped you? Good work, my man." With which curt acknowledgment he turned a shoulder of dismissal on Dukane.

Flames of anger jumped upward and encircled Jimmy's heart. To be treated as if he had saved a bucket of concrete from spilling, or a team from running away, filled his youthful breast with indignation to bursting. Then to have Corbetson calmly appropriate the heroine by virtue of his rank—that exceeded what mortal man could bear. With compressed lips, Jimmy did not budge. Corbetson perceived this, frowned. Thrusting a hand into his pocket and drawing it forth he extended a dollar towards the youth. Most shovelers would have accepted it with stammered thanks; Jimmy looked at it aversely.

"I cannot accept tainted money," said he offishly, putting his hands behind his back.

"Then get your time, you insolent dog," Corbetson snapped.

"You're not discharging him?" Enid Crofton cried.

"Yes, he's an impudent, disturbing nuisance."

"Just when he's saved my life! I'll never forgive you."

Corbetson swallowed his Adam's apple without reply in an endeavor to lubricate this threat. For Enid Crofton was the third responsibility, an uncertain one, which kept him tossing in uneasy wakefulness of nights; his unhappy soul had succumbed to her beauty and he lived from day to day in a torment of hope and dread concerning her favor.

"Go to your dinner, Hemple," he ordered the grinning youth.

Jimmy went, waving an exulting hand at the girl behind the superintending engineer's back.

His heart had bounded, his horizon had flashed with radiant light, at the indignant protest she uttered. Curiously too he had experienced an imperious demand during the instant when he carried her to safety for further acquaintance with this lovely young person. She was vivacious—was there not the scratch upon his cheek to testify to it? And

remarkably piquant, and possessed of a bloom as fresh as that of a wild mountain rose. Her spirits were abundant. Jimmy paused in his march to the mess-house to rub the tip of his nose and reflect how her toes had kicked industriously against his shins during his manful rescue. When first he had seen her as he rode beside Miller on the evening of his arrival, it had been as a flashing vision. To-day there had been no vision in this encounter, but throbbing reality. Jimmy had made the acquaintance of many young ladies, none however so spontaneous, so effective, so satisfactory, so spectacular, so inspiring, so glorious as this when dynamite shots were booming an accompaniment. It was quite up to the first act of a melodrama; aye, he was the poor, ragged, honest hero. That noon in the mess-house he crammed himself with food and complacency.

Procrastination was not one in his category of defects. In the store that evening, immediately after supper, he bought with lordly prodigality new overalls, shirt, hat, shoes and a bright red tie.

"Red is worn in the west, I believe," he mused aloud, "besides it suits my mysterious, Italian nobleman style of beauty."

"It sets off that bum eye for a fact," Pen-nick, the store keeper, jeered. "Want a coat?"

"I've heard that coats are favored among the higher classes. Give me a coat—no, not too embonpoint, something slender and cut princess. There, this will do."

"Only twelve dollars."

"Only! say you robber, you heartless vulture, you hireling of a predatory corporation that crushes the life out of laboring men and drinks their blood! Twelve dollars for an iron-hammered strait jacket that can be bought anywhere on Eighth Street for two-twenty! Merciful Jews, hide your compassionate faces! I'm going to sand-bag you some night for this crime, Penuckle."

"You're now already ten days behind your pay in your account."

Dukane groaned. "Is it possible for an honest man to survive this world?" And picking up his bundle he returned to the mess-house, where before the wondering eyes of the men he proceeded to array himself like unto Solomon. Baleful glances he shot at Lantry who drew near in sneering admiration and he silently placed his wagon-spoke in full view and significantly ready, as at once did Hop

Spencer, sitting by in astonished silence at this marvelous occurrence and this new dandy. Finally a question from his awed lips invoked a reply.

"I'm going forth unto dragons and strange castles," Jimmy explained. "Guard well our demesne, brother-knight, and henceforth call me Geraint Hemple, brave Geraint."

Forth he strode, while all the men crowded to the door. But the new knight only went as far as the mixing plant where he surveyed the valley. An amethyst light filled the hill-rimmed cup, the soft and limpid light of early evening; higher where the sunshine yet struck the air there was a shining layer like a wave of fine golden dust; below him the river flickered in surfaces of dull shimmering gray; and throughout the open basin the neighboring gorge seemed to spread a murmurous, invisible veil of sound that cloaked all else with imminent hush. He looked up at the massive peak which held the north; its black forests seemed to glimmer as if made of chilled slag; the crags and rocky cliffs, lofty, distant, creviced, were tinted pink and lavender, while the snow-clad peak itself was formed of glistening silver.

The picture was one such as he had seen on canvasses in galleries or in the houses of friends, which he had dismissed with the full conviction that painters looked at things as they were, then daubed them down as differently as possible. But now he realized there existed a natural beauty, a transcendent illusive spirit of color, which he had not hitherto conceived. A majestic calm clothed Silver Peak; peace lay on her little hills, calm and peace sentient with brooding thought. "And I, I am an insignificant ant on a stone looking up at it all," mused he, all at once subdued.

The buildings composing the camp seemed dwarfed by the upsweeping heights. Now they were quiet, hushed. Yet they incased the breath of endeavor, the undauntable will, the indefatigable energy of insects like himself that scuttled about in daylight and dug holes in the earth and tore up huge rocks and fought the hills and piled up masonry and changed the face of mountains. Their bodies were insignificant; their souls were god-like. His father's was the directing hand and mind. He, Dukane, junior, had never directed anything larger than a motor car and that not always scathlessly. Gazing up at the lofty, wide-

spreading mountain, he seemed to see its snows take on the semblance of his father's white head, its bulk his familiar figure. He stared, rubbing his eyes, against the illusion.

"Is that you, governor? Don't crush me. I've swung a shovel like a man," he exclaimed half-seriously, half-jestingly.

Presently he jumped up, looking along the road that led to Crofton's. Thither went four men, Corbetson and the doctor and some distance behind them the two assistant-engineers.

"Droves, droves of 'em," Jimmy lamented. "They'll fill up the whole place and I'll never get a word alone with her." He sat down again much dissatisfied. "And I've earned it—well, let them stick. I'll smoke out the dragon. Hemple will throw his castor into the ring with Big Chief, the little chiefs, doctor and all. I'll bet a January freeze will come over Corbetson when he sees his crawling slave march upon the stage and step into the spotlight. And he was going to fire me! Bless his shriveled up little heart—and bless her big one. When the society play is well started, then James will take a run and a jump and land in the middle. Enid! There's a name

I've loved all my life and never knew it. Now let's couch spear and gallop to the fray."

The road pursued the general course whence came the stream, sometimes skirting its bushy bank, again taking a short cut across a loop, until it reached the cluster of buildings. The large white-painted house, a chimney at each end marking it characteristically southern in style, and with a broad veranda running the length of one side, stood screened by trees from the bunk-house, barns, long sheds and corrals. A brook but a hundred feet away ran fast to the river, a clipped lawn spread in front and a graveled walk and a roadway ran up to the dwelling from an entrance gate.

A sudden silence fell upon the group on the veranda as he approached. Enid Crofton came a step forward to receive him, though with a quick tinge of color.

"You are commendably prompt, Mr. Hemple—is not that your name?" she greeted, putting forth a hand. Then turning to a tanned, straight-backed man, with gray sweeping mustache, "This is the gentleman, father, who rescued me."

"You're very welcome," said he, hospitably shaking hands, "and have placed me under

obligations." He scanned the scratch, the cut upon Jimmy's brow, the one eye yet partially discolored, but made no comment. "Your name is Hemple?"

"Hempdedinkle was the name I was called—then Hempdedink—I have finally abbreviated it to Hemple—Geraint Hemple."

Crofton eyed him curiously, then placed a seat for him. At the Christian name which the youth pronounced a fresh wave of color suffused the girl's cheeks and she turned for a moment aside, struggling to conceal her mirth.

"Both names are euphonious," she remarked. "Do you abbreviate your surname at will?"

"According to exigencies."

"These gentlemen—you know them?"

"Their names, but we've never met socially. Between sunrise and sunset I am only one end of a shovel; our spheres are different. My sphere is really the barrel of the mixing-machine."

"Come, come, Hemple," the round little doctor chirped. "No nonsense. We all know you. Why, Miss Crofton, he's half-nursed one of my patients to health, a big fellow who lost an arm. Know him, of course I know him!"

A rill of gratitude for the medico trickled in Jimmy's breast.

"Oh, we all know Hemple," the younger assistant laughed. "He keeps us from growing stupid."

Dukane shot him a deadly glance, but seeing that the young fellow, Leschelles by name, was grinning good naturedly, relented. The other, the stoop-shouldered, studious one, wiped his eye glasses and also smiled friendlily. But Corbetson apparently was not inspired to cordiality by one of his laborers playing the gentleman on Crofton's veranda and he held his peace.

The conversation drifted to other subjects. Corbetson and Crofton discussed the dam, the doctor and the first assistant and Enid chatted together, while Leschelles conversed with Dukane. The younger assistant was a short, chunky person not much older than himself, freckled, homely, friendly and with short-clipped, reddish hair, for whom Jimmy at once felt an instinctive liking.

"You're from the east," the assistant said, "I can tell by your accent. And this is your first whack at this kind of work, isn't it? Tough go on an unseasoned fellow. Haven't

been at it so long myself. Miss Crofton in speaking of her adventure mentioned that you had been to college. Must be learning the business from the ground up in the manner rich old codgers are always solemnly declaring we young chaps should do."

"Well, no, I was taken into captivity by force, dragged here snarling by Miller and am kept by force in the cage."

"We're all more or less in a cage here, but I like it."

"That," Dukane responded sententiously, "is because you don't swing a shovel."

"You're out of the shovel class yourself now, being a foreman."

Enid Crofton presently drew the two youths into the group which she dominated.

"We're planning a climb up Silver Peak."

"Some Sunday, just a scamper up and back," Satterfield, the first assistant, remarked pleasantly.

"Not to the top of course, those rocks would take Alpine guides."

"Begin to save your breath, Doctor," Leschelles chuckled.

"Count me out of any such expedition, I'm too fat."

"We must draw the line at Hemple," the first assistant remarked. "He had his turn to-day. Once is enough, give the rest of us a chance at rescue work. Here, all of us have hung about on tip-toe all summer—"

"Hung on tip-toe is indeed acrobatic," Jimmy interjected.

"And nothing ever happened. Young man," said Satterfield, "you now have four bitter enemies against you in the tournament for Miss Crofton's favor. Success, your success, has stirred our rage. It was bad enough before, now I feel particularly malignant." He polished his eye glasses and set them on his nose.

"Perhaps it's because I have system," Jimmy retorted, and no one knew why Satterfield burst into laughter.

The moon had risen and was flooding the basin with light. Mr. Crofton was telling a story of other times in the south and meanwhile Jimmy skilfully maneuvered until he sat beside the girl. The story came to an end, conversation broke forth.

Suddenly she said to him in a low voice:

"What is your right name? I know it's not Hemple."

Jimmy considered. Mystery is always fascinating to a woman; he would continue to be a mystery.

"I dare not tell."

"Are you afraid to go back?"

"Go back where?" he demanded, in turn surprised.

"To New York—you inadvertently mentioned it,—spoke of it familiarly."

"I've been to New York."

"And you've been to college also, so—" She significantly left the inference unfinished.

"The police are not after me—or wait, perhaps they are!"

For he recollected with a start that James A. Dukane, junior, had been a considerable while vanished, swallowed up. Dukane senior, had probably returned from Europe; there would be neither letter nor numerous cashed checks awaiting him, which would have been under normal circumstances the surest way of locating Jimmy's whereabouts. Three weeks and no money drawn; three weeks' subsistence on the hundred dollars received at San Francisco—an impossible feat for Jimmy! The governor would be distinctly worried; he too would have a mystery. And perhaps, as had

flashed through the youth's mind, the police of many cities would be at work on this case. Perhaps even now the newspapers printed long, illustrated articles on the son's weird disappearance. They would ask if he had been stolen like another, but grown-up, Charlie Ross. He had been kidnapped in truth by one, a certain Miller.

"You're concealing something," she said, "unless the explanation is that you have no money."

"Right, first guess."

"That's not all, there's something more. A gentleman would not need to shovel crushed rock like a laborer in order to earn a living. There are different ways. If the reason is nothing discreditable—"

"Not to me."

"Then why do you go under the name of Hemple?" she asked, impatiently.

"Because I've lost my other," he answered.

"I see, you're ashamed of it."

"On the other hand, it's ashamed of me. We're really progressing into an acquaintance, aren't we?"

She drew back as if stung. The rudeness of what she had been asking swept over her in a mortifying flush. Her eyes filled with

angry tears—anger at him, at herself; and she thanked heaven that the shadow in which she sat did not permit this youthful stranger to see her face. She was furious with herself, though longing for words to crush him. Even to Corbetson who had been uneasily trying to nerve himself to draw her away from the impudent Hemple she turned with relief. Never, never, never would she again ask the young fellow's name! Or, at least, ask it of him!

It was ten o'clock when the five men made their farewells. Enid and her father walked as far as the gate with them.

"You must come again, Mr. Hemple," the rancher cordially invited.

"I will, with pleasure."

"And in those blue overalls too, I suppose," Corbetson said unpleasantly, for the doctor's ear alone.

"I suppose so, seeing he can't come very well without them." Which did not at all satisfy the engineer, who from the first had been furious at the reception given Hemple by the other men, a recognition of equality. He was the more provoked when the young fellow said familiarly as they strolled down the road:

"Fine moon that, chief."

CHAPTER V

A MAGICIAN'S CAVE

“‘**YOU’RE** sure you can drive?” questioned Miller.

“I can tool six horses like Alfred V. himself,” Dukane announced, settling himself in the wagon-seat and clutching the long reins.

In the come and go of workmen the opportunity for a shift into Miller’s gang had quickly arisen. To be sure he had lost the dignity which enswathed a foreman, but that was only a humble garment after all, and so with a last admonitory whack upon the Austrian’s ribs he had turned over to his successor his truncheon of office and ascended a freight wagon. The pay was the same; he was, however, too deeply sunk in the sticky mire of debt to give the subject of wages more than a fleeting thought. What the feel of money was like he had forgotten. On the other hand he had sighted the possibilities of credit and hence had peace of mind. Of his skill with horses he was optimis-

tic; disastrous experience he had once had driving in his free and careless days in the east, after which he swore by automobiles; but time softens misfortunes and restores confidence.

He neatly unfolded his long whip, meanwhile keeping a commanding hand upon his steeds, and swung the lash in a loud, resounding crack. Instantly the animals rose in a tugging, plunging mass, chains rattling, heads flaring, hoofs striking. Miller ran to the leaders, pulled them down.

"You fool!" he roared. "Put away that whip."

Dukane acceded to the request.

"They will do," said he, "they have spirit."

"Here, Perley, you lead. This young devil will wreck the whole outfit if someone isn't driving ahead of him," Miller ordered.

Dukane thus locked in the midst of the string of half a dozen freight wagons must content himself to hold his reins and accommodate himself to the speed of the man ahead. Each outfit comprised six horses and two wagons hooked together, the one in the rear with its short sawed-off tongue thrust beneath the bed of the former. A chained block dragged at a rear wheel of each to check the

wagon from slipping back when halted part way up a climb; and heavy brakes served to regulate speed on steep descents. As the freighters passed the Crofton ranch house basking in the early morning sunshine Jimmy waved a hand to attract the attention of a girl standing in the yard, receiving an answering wave.

"Does she know who it is," he questioned of himself, "or was her response only a general recognition?"

From the top of the ridge where they presently paused, a magnificent prospect of mountains on either hand and of wide level plains in front opened before the youth's eyes. In the morning sunlight the brown earth seemed turned to gold, unbroken save for the thread of the telephone line stretching across it until lost. As the balmy air filled his lungs, as his mind expanded in harmony with the spaciousness of the picture, he experienced not only a buoyancy of spirits but a keen satisfaction with himself and the world. Just to be here up on this high seat holding the six reins and controlling the destiny of the team and wagon, just to be able to swing the long-lashed whip with a resounding crack, to feel his blood

bounding in his body, to be a free and living part of the glorious morning, all gave him a new and hearty exhilaration. When their advance began down the hill to an accompaniment of shrilling brakes and jingling harness-iron it seemed to be with a rude, barbaric kind of music. "Yo-ho, yip, yo-ho!" he shouted, unable to restrain his spirits.

Over the plain they made good time, for the road was hard and smooth, and by noon their wagons were loaded with cement, coal, provisions. This done, Jimmy skipped into the depot.

"Know me?" he cried to the station master's wife.

"You are—" pausing, she scrutinized him with her clear eyes, then exclaimed, "my tramp."

"Yes, your tramp. But I've reformed and become a teamster—the best one Miller has, though he doesn't know it. How's the kiddie?" He reached down and poked a finger into the youngster's chubby side till the boy gurgled with laughter. "You see, Miller captured and took me out to camp," he went on, "and made me into a respectable citizen. All because of your kindness and coffee."

"Why, you don't look the same person."

"I'm not," he grinned, "my name's Hemple now."

"What was it before?"

"That's a secret I can't tell you. Well, good-bye, I must be off to dinner. I'll see you often from this on."

During the meal Dukane, who had come in late and in consequence had been forced to sit at another table from the rest of his companions, fell into conversation with a garrulous old man who asked him many questions about himself, with comments upon the answers.

"That cement you're haulin', that Red Shield Brand, used to be made right over the hill yonder," said he.

"How can that be?" Jimmy inquired, one cheek full of food.

"Old mill out there, which was the Roseland Portland Cement Company. Not much good. Never did much manufacturing because the railroad wouldn't lay a spur over to it."

"But this cement is shipped in here."

"Then they've got another mill some'eres. But no—this is all there is to the Roseland Company, I reckon, for Andy Roseland sunk what little money he had in it and I never

heard he got a dollar out. Don't try to tell me anything about this mill, for I helped build it five years ago."

He spoke with an old man's insistence, looking balefully at the young fellow whom he imagined sought to dispute his statement.

"Where is this man Roseland now?"

"Over on Sand Creek—got a little ranch." And he went on to discuss the man with much multiplicity of detail, mentioning also that Sand Creek was twenty miles west of Crofton's ranch.

Dukane went forth not much wiser. The recollection of the station agent shifting cement from blue-printed bags to ones red-printed recurred to him with singular pertinacity. Was that the manner in which the Red Shield brand was manufactured? And in a freight car? On the other hand, if a business injury to the Corson Company which put out the blue bags was being perpetrated that company would certainly know of it and fight back.

"At any rate I'll look into this old mill one of these days," said he.

The opportunity was not long in presenting itself. At the order of Miller he awaited one

day the arrival of an afternoon train to receive and carry out a number of machinery parts which should arrive by express. When the other wagons had departed he stood a long time in thought, for now he discovered that he had many matters to engage him; and as he had two or three hours unoccupied he resolved to employ the time in an examination of the mysterious mill. He set off on his search, but at the top of the first knoll he halted anew; for the old man from whom he had acquired the information had been extremely vague when he jerked his thumb south and said "over the hill." As he considered the subject, he heard a rush behind him and whirling about perceived Enid Crofton galloping up on her pony.

"Why are you standing there with feet spread out and a finger laid on your brow as if you were a poet?" she exclaimed.

"I've lost a mill."

"A mill! Of all things! Mr. Miller was right when he bade me look after you, saying you would need watching. I came in for the mail and I find you standing on a hill, looking like a melancholy crow."

"Come help me find my mill."

"What mill?"

"An old cement mill."

"Why, it's yonder a little way," she answered, and pointed her gloved hand, "but don't get lost."

"The responsibility for my disappearance will rest on you unless you guide me thither." He took firm hold upon the pony's bridle. "I must find this mill, or be unhappy."

"I'll show you. But what in the world you want with that ramshackle old building I can't guess. It's deserted and ready to tumble down."

"I want to see it working."

"Ridiculous! There hasn't been a stroke of work done there for I don't know how long."

"Oh, do you think so? Come, we'll see."

Perplexed and curious she allowed her pony to pace along by his side while he chattered steadily of a hundred things. After passing over not one hill but several, they struck into a dim and vanishing road which she informed him led from the mill back to Melton, which in fact he should have followed in the first place. The building was indeed ramshackle, weather beaten, desolate. A chute led from what was half-quarry, half-cave in the hillside, where limestone had been taken out. A white

dump of waste lay before it, though now beginning to be grass-grown. Over the padlocked door was painted the name *Roseland Cement Company* in white letters, partly obliterated by rain and dust; the windows were broken, through the apertures of which they gazed upon a rubbish-strewn, empty floor to see that the building had been stripped of machinery. They climbed up to the quarry, entering into the space beneath the projecting dirt roof.

"This is a wonderful cave, a magician's cave," Dukane stated, enigmatically.

"Indeed, it doesn't look it. I imagine that it shelters more coyotes than magicians."

He led her to the entrance and pointed at the silent building.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Certainly."

"And you'll never breathe a word to anyone—to his nibs, my chief, to the engineers, to the doctor, to your father—"

"Stop! If it's so terrible as that I better not hear it."

She drew off a step towards where her pony was tied to a bush. The youth had spoken in a mysterious voice; she thought she perceived a

wild light in his eye—there flashed through her mind the question if he were mad.

“Very well, we’ll return to town,” said he.

“But what is it, what do you mean?” she gasped, pulled two ways by astonishment and curiosity.

“The secret—but it will have to be kept silent as the grave until I am ready.”

“Secret—till you’re ready!” More and more she was bewildered.

“For it’s the secret of my life,” said he.

He began to walk towards the building.

“Wait, you’re most exasperating. Are you in earnest? Have you a secret?”

“Several—horrible ones.”

“Tell me,” she commanded.

“Promise; hold up your hand and don’t cross your fingers.”

With which solemn preliminary she prepared herself to receive his mystery.

“Now,” she breathed expectantly.

“It’s this cave and building. My life is now wrapped up in them, darkly and inexplicably. As I told you this is a magician’s cave.”

“But the mystery?”

“Oh, that. Why, it lies in the fact that abandoned as the place is, idle as it is, yet there

are one hundred sacks of cement made in it every day."

She stared at him, then at the building, to come at last back to him. Her look searched his for latent signs of insanity; but his sparkling black eyes and chubby cheeks were far from those of a demented person.

"What's the mystery?"

"That's it, how it's done."

"Your dark and inexplicable life—"

"No, my life isn't that, but the secret of it is that I've got to find out how it's done."

"You're hoaxing me," she cried, angrily.

"Hanged if I am!"

She swung up into her saddle.

"I don't think I like you and your little mysteries."

"There is really a secret," he exclaimed, earnestly, "and I'm going to find it out."

But she made no answer, save to touch heel to her pony and ride towards the trail which led back to town. Jimmy raced after her crying out that she had brought him here and therefore did not dare to leave him. Vexed, indignant, at the same time choking back a laugh, she knew not what to do with such an absurd fellow. Meanwhile he had caught the

pony's bridle once more, declaring that he was not a person to be dropped at will in the sage brush; and by the time they reached town the absurdity of the whole affair had cleared her brow.

"Here is the rest of the mystery," he said, pointing to the freight car.

"Where?" she inquired lazily.

He led the pony to the car door. "Do you see the name printed in red on those sacks? That is the same as the one on the old mill."

"So it is," she answered, once more attentive.

"That's what I mean when I say there's a hundred bags a day manufactured up there—by ghosts. It's the same company."

"But look," she pointed towards the cement, "this is shipped in."

"Never."

"Why, of course, from another mill."

"I think not, I'm sure not. That's the mystery."

"What a crazy notion! Well, tell me when you find out. Here's the train coming."

The scornful disbelief in her voice as she derided his mystery made Dukane wrinkle his brow wrathfully. It was the last time he would ever confide in her, or for that matter,

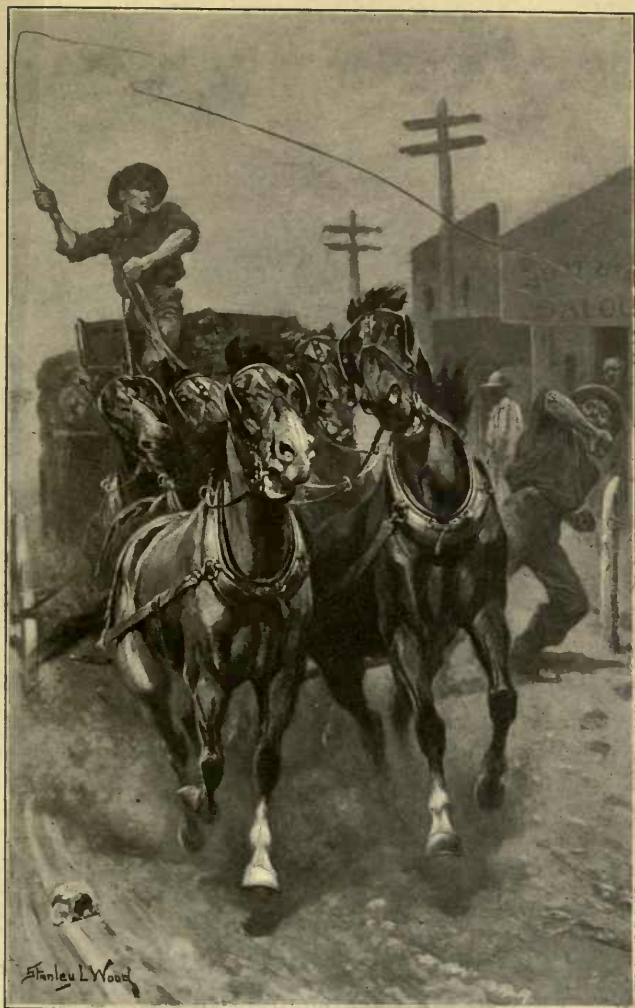
in any woman. He had been a fool to mention the subject; and probably she would forget all about her promise and let the cat out of the bag. In disgust he went to receive the express shipment. When he at last drove out of the hills which surrounded Melton and gazed forward with eager eye in the hope of catching some glimpse of her, the long road showed but a speck far in the distance. After her companionable talk of the afternoon, the time dragged slowly and when he reached Tunneltown, with evening at hand, he was bored with himself, hungry, thirsty, and in a vile temper. Half a dozen men stood before one of the saloon doors, who watched him pass, staring indolently in his direction until one with perceptions suddenly awakened strode out towards him hurling in his direction a string of curses. Lantry, the bunk-house bully it was, who had taken an afternoon off to drink; and now both the man's face and mind were inflamed by numerous potations of Tunneltown's fiery whiskey.

Dukane sprang up, holding the reins with one hand and shaking out the long, thin lash of his whip that would when properly directed cut like a knife. Swinging it once around his

head he shot it straight at the ruffian's face, where it cracked like a rifle a few inches before Lantry's nose. The man staggered back mute, pale, dumfounded at this swift attack, and it was not until the wagon was yards past that he again found his tongue to speed a fierce threat after the driver. As for Dukane, he once more composed himself with satisfaction upon the seat. A splendid calm now filled his mind, as if all his ill-temper had glided out of his mind along the whip in an electric current and discharged itself in the single loud snap; a psychological phenomenon which he did not trouble himself to explain. Indeed, he gave Lantry not two thoughts, for his youthful brain was busy all up the hill with the subject of another and far fairer individual. At the top of the ridge he shaded his eyes to gaze intently down into the basin filling with purple light and shadows in which the ranch house was beginning to merge.

Next day he learned from Hop Spencer that Lantry was on the war-path, breathing vengeance, swearing terrible oaths of what he would do to Hemple, declaring that he would wring the young fellow's neck.

"We'll have to look out," Hop stated, sitting



It cracked like a rifle a few inches before Lantry's nose

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on the edge of his bed, "for while he knows he'd better not tackle one of us here, he's the kind to catch a feller alone outside."

"Are there any more of us who hate him?"

"Plenty."

"Then we'll organize a posse."

Three or four other workmen who smarted under Lantry's sneers and rough horse-play joined with enthusiasm in Dukane's plan of defense, which was to go armed with a short club after work hours and unite in force whenever the bully assailed one of them. Reënforcement gives courage. Lantry attempted to bully one of the newly formed company before the bunk-house door in the evening, in the playful manner in which he was accustomed to amuse himself. Up sprang half a dozen men, also appeared half a dozen short stubby business-like billies, and he turned tail to flee under a shower of whacking blows.

Naturally Dukane felt proud; he would show the ruffian that he would tolerate no nonsense. Therefore when on a visit to Callahan, who was now able to sit up in the hospital and smoke a pipe, he received the little doctor's chuckling compliment on his small army as only a just meed of praise.

"But look out for him, my boy," Callahan warned, "Lantry is a black devil. If he can catch you alone, it will not be a fair fight and done with it, but he will stamp the life out of your body if you go down. He's a killer."

"Then I'll be a killer. So far as he goes, I will go."

"You're too bold a young cock," Callahan upbraided. "Some day a man will cut your comb and have you crawling on your belly to eat out of his hand."

"Well, I'll take a bite at his fingers while I'm lunching," was the very assured reply.

"I believe you would," the doctor stated, still chuckling.

Dukane borrowed the medico's desk for a time to write letters, the first letters since he became a vibrating atom in Silver Peak Basin. He spread out paper, examined pen, settled his body, then gazed at the opposite wall. Determination to find out all that was to be known concerning the Roseland Cement Company was a fixed purpose in his mind, but where he was to begin was another kind of an oyster to open; finally his eyes flashed—he would write to everybody, old man Roseland, the Corson Cement Company, Bradstreet's and—ha!

—Dukane and Company. That should bring in facts that would enlighten him as to who were the officers and where were the mills of the Roseland Company, and put him on the track of the mystery. With a very important air he scratched away at one missive after another, until rubbing his head in thought he concluded that he had exhausted all available sources of information. Yet as he considered the letters he grew more and more dissatisfied. "Action is what I want, and action is what I'll have," he announced to himself, seizing the letter addressed to the Corson Cement Company and tearing it into fine pieces. Then he dashed off another which stated that he had detected the Roseland Company stealing their competitor's cement, and if the Corson people wished to verify the fact to write him and secretly dispatch a man for a personal interview. With a flourish he signed the name of James Hemple. If this did not beget "action," nothing would, he decided. "As for that young lady," he muttered fiercely, though with apparent irrelevance, "I'll teach her to laugh at me."

On his next trip to town the letters were duly mailed and he turned his mind to other matters.

Most immediate of these was a call next

morning—Sunday—upon Satterfield and Leschelles, who lived in a shack close by the hospital. To these gentlemen, for whom none of his acts any longer held surprise, he expressed a desire to borrow a book on concrete construction. Satterfield, pointing with the razor with which he was at the moment shaving, informed him that there were a couple on such-and-such a shelf. But why did Hemple want them? Did he not already know all there was to be known on the subject?

"Nearly. Still I may perhaps glean an idea," Dukane retorted, promptly.

"Modesty is a jewel," Satterfield remarked.

"Well, I don't care for jewelry," was the easy answer, as he opened a book, seated himself and cocked his feet on a window-ledge. "Besides, if I'd been modest I'd still be shoveling rock instead of tooling one of Miller's rapid-transit conveyances."

He dove into the book, where he remained submerged for some five minutes. Leschelles who was writing out reports of cement tests looked over his shoulder at the other engineer and winked; for the volume in their visitor's hand was not a little technical and their visitor sat with knit brow endeavoring to elucidate its

mysteries. Finally he gazed out of the window, then scratched the tip of his nose with forefinger.

"This is rather elementary," he stated patronizingly, "haven't you something on the subject which is more advanced, something profoundly scientific?"

"Unfortunately not," Satterfield replied, examining his newly shaved chin.

"What I'm seeking for is the answer to the riddle, when is a concrete dam not a concrete dam?" the youth stated. As neither of the engineers seemed particularly impressed he continued, "I've the first part of the solution, which is, 'when it's filled with rubbish'; and the last part, which is, 'when it's washed away.' But what's the rest of the conundrum?" And he lighted a cigarette while awaiting results.

Both men stopped abruptly in what they were doing, stared at him, after which they exchanged a swift look. He had tapped the vein which they themselves had dreaded to open, which indeed had often been the subject of their private speculation. But Dukane turned to them a face of child-like innocence. They said nothing.

"I will now see if you know your lessons,"

the youthful investigator went on. "First question, Leschelles: how much water will Silver Peak Reservoir impound?"

"A couple of hundred thousand acre feet."

"How much pressure in tons will that make upon the dam?"

"What the devil are you driving at?" said Leschelles, wrinkling his freckled nose.

"At the dam, to be sure. That's what the water will be doing. How many tons did you say?"

"I didn't say."

"Black mark for you, Leschelles. Mr. Satterfield, now that you've finished smoothing your wrinkled cheek of care, I'll propound a hypothetical question for you, as the lawyers say. If—"

"I hope it's not as long as theirs," the first assistant interjected.

"If it requires a dam thirty feet thick, built of solid reinforced concrete to hold a certain lake of water," went on the interrogator, "how many lakes of water will the dam hold if its core is not solid but is made of loose rubble?"

"What's all this nonsense?" Satterfield said, shortly.

Dukane now rose to his feet. "I see that you fellows won't talk."

"We're not supposed to talk. We simply obey orders. How this dam is built doesn't concern you or us."

Dukane accepted the admonishment, taking himself once more into his book, while Satterfield from time to time cast uneasy glances at him and wondered if talk that the dam was not safe was common among the men. Strange it was certainly that Dukane and Company had undertaken so tricky a piece of construction; not to be accounted for, unless the management had adopted an anything-for-money policy. Later, the disaster which was destined to occur here would seriously impair the company's credit, and being a conscientious engineer his anxiety grew more acute. Leschelles too, he observed, was evidently disturbed by the same thought, for he sat idle and moodily gazing at the wall. A sense of guilt weighed upon Satterfield: to go on building with the knowledge that faulty construction was being palmed off for good, a circumstance which would ruin land-holders and numerous farmers when the reservoir burst its bounds, made him a tacit ac-

complice to the deed. And yet, what was his duty in the matter?

"Here is another one," Jimmy remarked.

"Another what?"

"Hypothetical." A dreamy light was in his eye. "If four chorus girls can eat twenty-three lobsters a week, and there are a million chorus girls on Broadway, how long will the available supply of lobsters last?"

"The lobsters they eat or the lobsters who feed them?" the engineer inquired sardonically.

"The former; the supply of the latter will never be exhausted."

"Well, that's the important thing," Satterfield said. "Sorry I can't stay longer." He picked up his hat—"I'm off for a ride with Miss Crofton."

Dukane bounded up. "With her?"

"To be sure."

"I'll murder you some day," Jimmy exclaimed, "murder you in cold blood." A happy thought struck him. "I'll go along."

"Oh, I rather think not."

"If that isn't hard luck! By heaven, I'll beat you to her this afternoon! All right, make hay while the sun shines; my turn's coming." Throwing himself back on his chair he

glared at Leschelles while Satterfield went off laughing. "I suppose I'll have to entertain myself with you. Seems to me that all that you fellows do is to hang around the Crofton ranch."

But Leschelles only chuckled and went on with his calculations. Grumbling for a time Dukane began to overhaul the book-case, until he found a novel which suited him, whereupon he gave over study of concrete construction and followed the hair-breadth escapes of a hero clothed in all the splendid qualities found on or off the earth as he captured an obscure kingdom of Europe and established upon its throne a beautiful young queen who possessed a designing uncle and eight or ten despairing lovers.

"That fellow's not human," he remarked, snapping the book shut. "He has all the virtues of a demi-god and wears a collar three inches high—the pictures show it. If I had him here I'd make him shovel rock till that collar looked like a coal-heaver's apron. Do you believe in miracles, Johnny Leschelles?"

"No, why?" Leschelles had finished his task and settled down to leisure.

"That's too bad. For it's going to take a miracle to make that dam hold water."

The other flushed.

"I'm not here to say what it will or will not do."

"Why don't you sharpen a stick and go after the chief?"

"And get fired? Yes, that would be fine." Then after a moment he continued in an embarrassed voice, "I wish you wouldn't speak of this to me again, Hemple. I can't very well listen to it, you know."

"Right you are. But I'll show what's-his-name yonder a thing or two." Up he bounced and shook his fist at Corbetson's building.

"What do you mean?"

"He's a—" Dukane broke off, discretion gaining the upper hand.

Just then the doctor entered and said he would sit in a game of three-handed bridge. This was a diversion from an unpleasant subject which Leschelles was glad to welcome; therefore they were presently hard at it.

"Did you ever really play bridge before?" the doctor inquired of Dukane, with that pleasant irony which is practised by the best players.

"If you could distinguish the difference be-

tween a *finesse* and a box of pills I would answer you," was the swift reply. "And speaking of pills, Doc, how much strychnine does it take to kill a healthy man?"

"Three or four pounds should be enough."

"Good, I feared it might take a hundred-weight or so, which would require a considerable time to swallow. I want to do a quick job with my victim."

"Who's to have the honor of your ministrations? Yourself? If I played a hand as weirdly as you do—"

"No, it's Satterfield. The brazen villain's gone riding with Miss Crofton."

CHAPTER VI

CHAMPION OF THE WEAK

JAMES A. DUKANE, after a month of business in London and on the Continent, sailed for New York and bethought him of his son. Inquiry at his office and home disclosed that the youth had not, according to instructions last given, put in an appearance after concluding the mission he had had the San Francisco branch assign him, or if the boy had returned he had sedulously kept himself out of sight. A wire to the Pacific Coast brought the information that Dukane junior had reported a month previous, received a ticket to Melton and one hundred dollars, and taken his departure for the destination ascribed, since which time nothing had been heard from the young man. Resentment made the father repeat once more his threat to make or break the incorrigible; then he summoned his confidential clerk and requested him to find from what address his son had last drawn checks. The last check

issued to James junior was, it appeared, the San Francisco check for one hundred dollars. Astonishment dwelt on the father's face, where the confidential clerk had seldom beheld evidence of any emotion.

"What do you make out of that, John?" Dukane senior finally asked.

"Perhaps he's grown economical."

"Then it will be the marvel of the age. Find out where he is." And with the confidence that he would presently be apprised of the whereabouts of his errant progeny he put the matter aside for the time to consider the plans of a light-house.

Twenty-four hours later the clerk informed him that no trace of his son could be found. Apparently the boy had vanished in clean air; the ticket supplied him had been used to Melton, but in answer to a telegram dispatched to the manager of the Silver Peak Dam by the San Francisco office, in which a description of young Dukane's dress and mention of a letter of introduction were made, an answer had been received that no such person had presented himself. A wrinkle appeared in Dukane senior's forehead. He glared with compressed lips past his clerk. Where was the young

scoundrel? Had he cut loose on his own hook? An angry surge of feeling filled the father's breast; he would let him go; the boy was worthless, a spendthrift, a profligate, a ne'er-do-well, who had never turned his hand to work in his life and who would probably sink, once he were deprived of a supply of money, to the muddy bottom. That this should be the end of his son! His confidential clerk, masking his face, awaited his employer's further directions; nevertheless he was curious as to what action the oft-tried parent would now take.

"Locate him, but don't let him know," Dukane finally said.

That, however, was not easy, as the secretary found by the end of a week, and he more than once expressed himself forcibly though privately as to Dukane junior's character and conduct. In fact, nothing whatever could by the ordinary means at his disposal be found of the youth's present abode. Finally on his own responsibility he placed the matter in the hands of the police of various Western cities, who instituted a search. The result of this move was the finding of a traveling bag marked with Jimmy Dukane's initials, said bag being then in a pawn shop in Butte, Montana.

Corbetson had received the San Francisco office's telegram describing James Dukane junior's personal appearance and dress and mentioning the letter of introduction, and replied that the son of the Company's president had not visited Silver Peak Basin, and promptly forgot the inquiry. His mind was worried by more immediate and important affairs. Between the impudent tatterdemalion sporting a black eye, a bruised and muddy countenance, and the wealthy, high-flying son of whom he had heard vague and not particularly creditable tales, what was there to arouse even a suspicion of identity? The dilapidated hobo's first claim that his name was Dukane had long been forgotten, if indeed it had been heard at all, though the hobo himself, now blossomed forth into an insolent, presuming workman who did not know his proper station, was a vivid enough personality. Corbetson was growing more morose. He had acquired the habit of sitting in his office late at night with a bottle and glass hidden handily in a compartment of his desk, which he would draw forth at intervals. The whiskey warmed, comforted him, relaxed his mind from the secret strain under which it labored so much of the time. During those late

hours he would figure and calculate on a pad of paper, the sheets of which he afterwards always carefully destroyed;—his bank account was growing. Once this construction job was finished, the harassment of its worry at an end, he would resign from the employ of Dukane and Company forever. Ah, that would be a relief! More and more it seemed that the company loomed over him in some indefinite, menacing way; but reason told him this was but the fancy of an excited imagination. All was well. Only one or two things were necessary to be arranged at the completion of the work, chief of which was the inducing of his assistants to sever their connection with the company—an increased salary for a year in his own employ would accomplish this end and eliminate chance of intimate knowledge of this dam construction percolating higher.

But the new element of Enid Crofton's personality had entered in to disturb his plans. Her face, her eyes, the music of her voice stirred an uncontrollable hunger which he could neither crush by an effort of will nor satisfy by association. Each time he visited her home he departed more ardently anxious to see her again, to be with her for hours. This feeling

he masked as far as possible from his assistants and others, being naturally secretive and cautious, yet the flame burned steadily and strong. For her part, she made no distinction between him and the others, nor indicated any sign of reciprocal liking; indeed, she was quite as ready to welcome that young Hemple who had played up the silly rescue at the dam as she was to greet him who was chief and manager. What did she mean, what did her father mean, by showing friendship to one who had been picked up out of the muck? The young scoundrel would have been discharged weeks ago had not the girl's imagination been kindled by his puppy heroism. It was sickening, the whole business! Well, she would undoubtedly tire of his antics, behold the real nature of the presumptuous, talkative fool, and dismiss him from further acquaintance;—at which conclusion he generally arrived each night.

It would have indeed been a satisfaction to Corbetson to have known that the youth on whose head he poured the vial of his imprecations was in difficulties on his very account. One evening when Dukane found himself the sole companion of Enid Crofton upon the wide veranda she suddenly interrupted their light

conversation by introducing the topic of his mystery.

"What more have you succeeded in learning?" she questioned.

"Not a thing. I thought you had forgotten that matter."

"I would have done so but for one thing. Did you ever stop to think, Mr. Hemple, on whom your mystery reflects, if, in truth, there is one as you insist?"

"I haven't insisted, not once since we saw the mill."

"Well, you insisted that day at least. But you're not answering my question."

"In regard to reflecting on someone?"

"There is only one conclusion to draw, if any wrong in this project is being committed." She bent her brows at him gravely.

"What?" he inquired.

"That Mr. Corbetson is implicated."

"Well?" Jimmy responded, with great calm.

"As he's in charge, he's responsible; and therefore you accuse—"

"Oh, I haven't accused anybody of anything. Apparently you have given this a great deal of thought for a matter which struck you as ridiculous."

"I have. Mr. Corbetson is our friend."

"What would you like to have me do?" Jimmy asked, cynically. "Get down on my knees and do homiage to him?"

She threw back her head in anger. "Of course not, but you could at least be loyal to your chief."

"Can't do it. He'd fire me in a minute if he dared."

"Why shouldn't he dare?"

"Well, you know you've taken me under your wing," the youth stated brazenly, "and so it wouldn't do at all."

Enid rose, with flashing eyes.

"You're very bold and impertinent. Mr. Corbetson is at full liberty to dismiss you any time and I shall inform him that I'm under no obligations to you. After all you are only—"

"Quite right. I'm only a day laborer," cried Jimmy, bounding to his feet and seizing his hat. "You're under no obligations to me and never have been, I assure you freely. It is I who am under obligations to you for your many kindnesses; and I perceive that you consider me a poor creditor. Have no fear, I'll not offend you by my presence in the future."

"I fear that you would find it difficult to meet Mr. Corbetson here when we all know that you do not like him."

"Mr. Corbetson may find it embarrassing to meet me one of these days. Good evening." And he stalked down the gravel path, clothed in what he hoped was impressive dignity.

Left to herself the girl dropped into a chair with pulses still running rapidly. Indignant at him, angry with herself, and scarcely understanding why she had leaped so quickly to the defence of the chief engineer for whom she cared nothing, she stared after his rapidly moving figure until it disappeared down the moonlit road. A flush of shame burned her cheeks as she recalled how she had almost uttered words of disparagement concerning his position in the camp; and moreover she knew that whereas Hemple did not like Corbetson she herself instinctively disliked the man. What if the youth were right? What if there were something wrong in the camp? But her visitor was so assured, so egotistical, so— A fresh wave of anger swept over her, while she vowed never to see him again.

In an access of restlessness she paced the lawn, turning over in her mind the circum-

stance of her rescue by the youth, and subsequent events. He himself was the mystery. Presently two of her father's cowboys who had been on a visit to Tunneltown rode past her on their ponies and she caught Hemple's name on their tongue.

"What is it, Jack? What happened to him?" she called to the speaker, approaching.

They drew rein.

"It's not what's happened, but what's goin' to happen, Miss Enid. There's a big bully over in camp who's got it in for the young fellow. Seems like the boy called his game."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, you see there's a lame fellow named Hop Spencer who this Lantry took to kickin' around for fun, so Hemple got a bunch of his friends together and jumped him one evening when the bruiser started to make merry."

"Served him right for picking on a helpless cripple."

"Lantry knows Hemple's the organizer and swears he'll get even. Other day he cussed Hemple in Tunneltown and the boy let him have it with a whip."

"But what can the man do?" she inquired, anxiously.

"He'll wait till he catches Hemple alone."

"If his friends are organized, that won't happen."

"Oh, I don't know. Lantry's got half a dozen men like himself who'll jump into a fight at the drop of a hat."

"It isn't right—it oughtn't to be allowed."

The cowboy grinned. "How you goin' to stop it, Miss Enid? The camp picks up a lot of riff-raff and hoboes; they're always fightin' among themselves and about the best thing is to let 'em scrap it out like a lot of dogs. From what I hear this young Hemple sort of likes a mix-up himself, so Miller says. Of course, durin' workin' hours they keep quiet, for they're on pay time then, and consequently it's likely to be nights that trouble will start. Well, I'm with Hemple—that Lantry's a bad nut. And to jump on a cripple, that's rotten."

"I hope nothing happens to Mr. Hemple."

"No tellin'." And bidding her good-night, the pair rode on towards the corrals.

With this fresh information she beheld the young man whom she had so angrily dismissed appearing in a new and romantic light and her heart experienced a sharper reproach for her late act. If he were not loyal to his chief, he

was at least loyal to his friends and ready to defend them; she could imagine the spirited resistance he had made in behalf of the cripple, imagine his black eyes flashing and his form taut with warlike fierceness. He was a very fearless young fellow to take up bludgeons with the man Lantry (how literally bludgeons she did not guess). The upshot of her musings was that she determined to speak to the chief engineer about this scandalous state of outlawry—for outlawry it seemed when a brute such as had been described to her could intimidate weaker men. Had Dukane known the substance of her reflections he would have swelled with fresh wrath—he intimidated, indeed!

About this time Hemple became aware that the greater world outside of Silver Peak Basin was concerned with the whereabouts of a certain individual, by name James A. Dukane, Jr. That any fuss should be made over the comings and goings of this person struck him at first with surprise; for though the yellow journals had in the past now and again given an inch or two of space to the young man it had not been in a particularly laudatory vein and chiefly to ex-

hibit him as an example of the second generation decadent; otherwise he had pursued his way in peace. His second feeling was one of satisfaction at now being taken seriously, if not favorably. How the stir came to his attention befell thus: He one day observed a man talking busily with the station agent, a man not an inhabitant of Melton certainly, and Jimmy idly leaned upon his shovel, being at the time engaged in loading coal into his wagon from a freight car, to consider the stranger. Presently the agent gestured towards him, whereupon the man bent his steps toward the spot.

"Are you from the camp?" he asked, lifting himself up on a wagon-hub.

"Yes."

"I want a talk with you." The man mounted to the seat.

"Go ahead—but you can't sell me any gold rings, patent medicines, or mining stock."

"You'll do for this village," the other retorted drily, "but keep off the pavements. They serve fresh ones like you every night for supper."

"And the stale ones go to the garbage-pile. How did you miss it?"

The man smiled. "I guess you'll do any-

where. But cut out vaudeville talk and give me some information."

Jimmy sat down on the coal and proceeded to manufacture a cigarette.

"I'm the last edition of Britannica—name the subject."

The visitor unfolded his story. A young spendthrift who lived in New York, but had made a trip to the Pacific Coast, was missing and for the last two or three weeks the police of all the Western cities had been making a quiet but unsuccessful hunt for him. Voluntary disappearance on the part of the boy was one theory, foul play another. The young fellow's father, who was the president of the Dukane company, was behind the search; while the speaker himself was a newspaper reporter of San Francisco sent by his paper to run down the mystery—for a mystery more than that which would lie in a simple evanishment was suspected because of the reticence on the part of the elder Dukane to discuss the matter. There might even be a big sensation in it. At any rate the prominence of the parties concerned would make a solution of the affair good news. Young Dukane had set out for Melton and the Silver Peak Reservoir camp, and to

judge by his past record in New York and other places, if he had arrived the camp would certainly have known it.

"He must be a lovely young person," Jimmy remarked.

"A spender all right."

Safe in a mask of coal dust which gave his countenance the sooty hue of an Ethiopian, Dukane inquired what appearance the lost prodigal presented.

"About your build — dissipated — well dressed."

"Perhaps he eloped."

"That would be like him, but he didn't have any money to speak of. He disappeared here. The ticket he used has been traced and it showed without question that he came to this dropping-off place and apparently dropped clear off the earth. Nobody has seen him, though the hotel man over there remembers a young fellow coming in one night, but he isn't sure. Besides, he doesn't keep a register."

"That's a tough hole yonder, as I know. Maybe they murdered him, thinking he had cash." And Jimmy turned a suspicious look on the hostelry.

"I wonder—" the man broke off in his surmise and also gazed at the building.

"Did you see a hard-looking man in there, a fellow with a shaven head and wicked eye? Say, he's just tough enough to stick a knife into anybody that he thought had coin. Then their meals alone would kill a man. But take my tip, the fellow with the billiard-ball head is your one sure thing here in Melton."

The man pondered; the suggestion, he considered, was not at all unlikely and it dovetailed with the foul play theory. Remembering the steely appearance of the tavern-keeper's eyes when he had first seen him, the thin lips, the expressionless face, he conceived that the prospect of gaining money might have tempted him to some villainy. Dukane junior had certainly arrived at the station, alighted; almost conclusively it appeared that he had not gone to the company camp; and as that was his purpose in coming hither the inference was to be drawn that he would not have departed without making it a visit.

"And I'll bet money the body's buried in the cellar," said Jimmy with conviction. "Look here, send me a copy of your paper with the write-up in."

"Don't be in a hurry, the corpse isn't dug up yet," the reporter advised, as he descended from his seat. "Now don't talk this to everyone you meet. If anything comes of this you'll get a piece of money."

"I need about ten dollars now."

But the reporter to all appearances did not hear the statement, at least he continued to walk away without reply. Satisfaction Jimmy had, however, in imagining the newspaper ferret on the track of the thin-lipped individual who had been instrumental in pitching Dukane into the street his first morning in Melton. One regret he presently developed as he considered the conversation, in that he had not implicated the bartender who had wielded the deadly beer-bottle at the time of his encounter. If now he could have planted a body under the hotel convenient to discovery, revenge would have been certain.

It was next day while speculating on what progress the man from San Francisco had made that that person came violently out of the depot to where he shoveled coal. The journalist's face indicated that all had not gone joyfully in the course of his investigation.

"You young devil," he shouted, "what did

you mean by sending me over there yesterday on a wild-goose chase! There isn't any cellar."

"Then they put the body in the cistern."

"Look at my face, how that bartender beat it up. All because of you! You knew that the man was honest, everybody here knows it, depot agent and all. He said if any person around here would commit murder it would be you, and I believe it, for you nearly got me killed. I've half a notion to climb up there and take it out of your skin, you unwashed loafer."

"Didn't I tell you yesterday that you were a stale one?" Jimmy remarked calmly. "Can't be much of a paper that will send a 'has been' like you to hunt news. Well, I'm accommodating. Climb up, if you want a drink of my blood."

Dukane laid down his shovel, but the reporter made no move to accept the invitation.

"I'm going out to the camp, but not in your wagon."

"That's agreeable," Jimmy stated, as the man moved off down the siding to where another teamster was at work.

Out of the incident Dukane nevertheless

had much food for thought. The fact that his father was anxious on his account caused him little anxiety, but fear lest his identity should be discovered before he had time to investigate the Roseland Cement Company and the graft which he suspected was being operated in connection with it brought him uneasiness. He had started on this job and he had never been a quitter. It would be much simpler to get at the dishonesty from the bottom up than from the top down; once the persons involved guessed that they were under a shadow, all evidence of their work would be destroyed. Further, he was enjoying himself immensely, what with Corbetson, what with Lantry, what with the mystery of the dam. To be haled back to the city and chucked into an office did not suit his fancy in any respect. Outdoors for him! Then there was a certain high and mighty young lady who had to be taught the waywardness of her action; and in the pleasant anticipation of this teaching he leaned so long upon his shovel, with an idiotic grin engraving his coal-begrimed face, that Miller shouted to know if he had paralysis.

Reflection upon the subject of Enid Crofton brought into his mind, however, a doubt

as to the degree of success he might expect in this undertaking. Her nature was too direct, too straightforward, too uncompromising where right was concerned, to sacrifice principle; and it was this fact that gave her in his eyes her singular charm. She was too honest for trickery, too proud for subterfuge, and too ardent for subtlety—which were qualities only too common in those young ladies with whom he had had acquaintance in New York. Therefore the doubt grew and grew, and by the time he had mounted the hill on his way home, where over his horses' heads he could look down upon the Crofton ranch-house nestling in the basin, he had reached the conclusion that he had not on the occasion of their last meeting conducted himself in a manner to win her, or his own, high respect. Distinctly he had been wrong and he had acted like a spoiled boy.

He came into the bunk-house in an unenviable state of mind, where as a result he had a hot interchange of compliments with Lantry, a scowl for everyone else except Spencer, and even a short word for that cripple.

"What's wrong, Jimmy?" Spencer inquired anxiously, sitting down beside him on the bunk.

Dukane sat with his jaw between his fists.

"Nothing, just nothing—that is, everything. I'm sick of myself."

"Not goin' to quit?" was the still more anxious question.

"I should say not!"

"Guess it's Lantry then. Can't we sort of figure out a way to do him up for keeps, run him out of the camp?"

"No, it isn't on account of that scoundrel. He don't scare me for a minute. It's just me."

In baffled wonder his friend cast about in his mind for some solution of this unusual exhibition of gloom. Hemple had heretofore been the incarnation of liveliness, good spirits, dash and optimism; to see him now down in the mouth bespoke some terrible catastrophe of spirit; and Hop Spencer was not in the habit of dealing with catastrophes of soul, either in others or in himself. So he remained silent, mouth open, while his simple mind made extraordinary excursions to the horizon of imagination in an endeavor to discover some plausible explanation of his friend's profound unhappiness.

"Wish I could do something for you," he said at last, helplessly.

Dukane looked up, perceived the sympathy, worry and trouble upon the cripple's countenance and immediately smiled sunnily.

"Why, you old woman," he exclaimed, clapping Spencer on the shoulder, "nothing's the matter, except that I made an unmitigated fool of myself and am merely telling myself about it."

"Well, that's nothing," was Spencer's relieved answer. "I reckon we all do that at times, from the chief down to me."

It was with burning envy that Dukane saw Leschelles make his way about dusk up the road to the ranch-house. When it grew dark he found himself moving in the same direction, to halt, however, some distance off and gaze from afar with immense yearning at his lost paradise. Thus for a time he suffered a pleasing melancholy, until at last he had squeezed the last drop out of this emotion, and so wandered back to hunt up Callahan for a chat. But it was not without reaching a decision; he would promptly apologize to Enid at the first opportunity.

In camp he again ran afoul of Lantry, who was accompanied by two or three of his fellows. Jimmy, deciding discretion to be the

better part of valor upon the present occasion, started to give ground and pass by on one side with all the unostentation of a pup pursuing a distant goal. He was not to win past so easily; Lantry checked his advance by blocking the way.

"Afraid of me now, are you?" he jeered.

"No, I'm not afraid of you at any time, you thug; move aside or I'll put you to sleep," rejoined Dukane, suddenly adopting a policy of boldness, though with inward trembling.

Lantry leaped forward and struck a blow that knocked him a dozen feet and left him stunned and prostrate. When he recovered himself, the men had passed on, laughing among themselves and flinging back taunts. Jimmy rose to his feet unsteadily; he was sick, very sick, but in his breast there flamed a fierce determination immediately to square the score. He hastened to the bunk-house, he summoned his cohort of warriors, held a whispered council with them outside and then arming them with their cudgels, led them forth on a noiseless hunt. Of this reprisal Lantry and his two companions were first apprised when all at once a dozen shadows flitted out of the darkness about and fell on them with wordless fury.

The three men sought to flee but were headed off, were driven hither and thither under a shower of blows and cuffs and kicks. Did they swing on one assailant, instantly half a dozen were striking them behind. The sound of the *mêlée*, the cries, shouts, yells of pain and calls for help finally reached the bunk-houses, which erupted a host of men to find the cause of this unwonted alarm. Upon their arrival at the spot, however, only Lantry and his two allies were discovered and they in a state of dilapidation; their bodies mauled and bruised, their heads and faces bleeding, their nerves badly shaken, their clothes ripped and torn. In the state of excitement which governed and in consequence of the darkness which prevailed during the encounter they could give little intelligence of the battle. Lantry nevertheless divined the instigator of it and swore that he would have Hemple's heart. Jimmy and his men sat in their empty bunk-house calmly awaiting the issue.

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Dukane senior looked at his confidential clerk from under frowning brows which that subordinate had had occasion of late to know only too well.

"I want that boy found," he stated, slowly, distinctly and decisively, and with finality.

"But if he's dead—" the clerk began. He hoped that Dukane junior was dead; he had cursed him heartily more than once since the boy's disappearance. Jimmy had become his burden, his nightmare, his nemesis.

"He's not dead," Dukane senior said. "You can't kill young animals like him—and I want him. He's my boy, my flesh and blood!"

The clerk withdrew to continue his distracted search; the parent sank into thought. Could it indeed be that his son had met death by some accident, some misadventure? Was it not his own fault as much as the boy's that Jimmy had run wild, made no use of his talents, had fallen away from him? If he had devoted less time to the vast business machine which he had created, if he had less considered light-houses and subways and given more of his love and thought to Jimmy the latter would have been a more faithful son.

Under the lash of this self-accusation he rose and paced to and fro across the room; the roar of the city did not reach his ears, the presence of the immense hurly-burly of which he was a

part was lost to him, while his mind groped out into that distant West in which the boy must somewhere dwell.

All at once he halted. "If they do not find him," he said, "then I shall go myself." With a fresh access of determination he strode to his desk and wrote a number of telegrams. "A little longer, then I'll go myself."

CHAPTER VII

BY THE RIVER

“**I** ACKNOWLEDGE that I was wrong, I can’t be fond of Corbetson,” Jimmy said.

“How ridiculous! It’s not necessary that you be fond of him,” the girl responded.

“Well, I can’t be loyal to him—not on two dollars and a half a day.”

“You can treat him civilly.”

“All right, I’ll do it because of you.”

“No, not for me; it must be on principle.”

“I have no principles. It shall be for you, or it will not be.” And he said with a sudden earnestness that stupefied her, “I’d do anything for you, Enid.”

For a moment she knew not which she would do,—blush, gasp or laugh; but she concluded by doing no one of the three—she turned aside and moved up the stream.

They were fishing. Jimmy deciding after a brief exile from the light of her presence to

subdue his pride and make such amends as would restore him once more to the favored circle had accordingly taken a day off, gone to the ranch-house where he made elaborate apologies and manifested a rather suspicious contrition, and had begged her to join him in a fishing excursion. Up the little river therefore they were now making their way, vastly more interested in themselves than in the trout which lurked in cool shady pools or in foaming rapids. Overhead a few billowy clouds floated across the clear azure of the sky, an azure which Silver Peak rearing its lofty crest strove in vain to pierce. But the mountain's huge front nevertheless loomed gigantic and as they ascended the stream and began to climb its first slope, down which the water raced with a louder song, they experienced a sobering sense of its might, an expanding grasp of its majesty.

"Let us sit down awhile," Enid said, seating herself upon a rock. "See the glitter of the sunlight on the snow so high up yonder. How fine it would be to soar like an eagle up and up until one was lost in the ether!"

Jimmy gazed at the height she indicated, then at her clear oval face and rapt eyes; in

imagination she circled like the great bird she had named and floated between earth and heaven. Somehow now as never before the simple sincerity of her nature, the clear, honest current of her soul, flowing as sweet and straight and pure as the water of the mountain stream at their feet, gripped him with a strange, a new, a wonderful emotion of delight. Unconsciously she had spoken to the mountain, reached forth a hand as to a competent and trusted brother. Jimmy closed his eyes and breathed a deep, delicious, satisfying draught of happiness. Then his eyes popped open in astonishment; astonishment it was, nothing less. For—for he loved her!

"I think I'll fish," he gasped.

Slowly she turned about, coming to earth. She perceived the youth stupidly regarding her.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" she asked, perplexed.

"I—I don't know. I feel queer."

"You look not only queer but foolish. Does the sudden desire to catch a fish affect you in that fashion? Well, what will happen when you really have one on your hook?"

"I don't know."

She gazed at him intently, all at once caught in a mesh of anxiety.

"Is it the climb? Do you feel faint? Have you a weak heart?"

"My heart—yes, that's it, my heart."

Fear now took full possession of the girl; she sprang up and laying hands upon his shoulders forced him to be seated, then she dabbled her handkerchief in the icy water and laid it on his brow, pressing it down with firm fingers. A shiver shook Dukane's frame as the chill penetrated to his skull; two rivulets coursed along his face, one down each cheek, and a sickly idiotic grin distorted his countenance.

"Feel better?" she asked, solicitously.

"Yes, oh, yes."

"You won't faint?"

"No."

She withdrew, stepped back a pace and scrutinized him. The examination proved satisfactory.

"Now wipe your cheeks. Think you can go on?"

"I would go to heaven with you," was the adoring answer.

"You appear entirely recovered," she said, drily.

"Oh, but it's just begun and I'll never get over it!"

"Then we'd best go home."

"No."

"I don't believe you were going to faint at all," she exclaimed with dawning suspicion, with indignation.

"But it helped me, the handkerchief. I like it."

"Is your heart weak, or is it not?" she demanded imperiously.

"It isn't what you would call exactly weak," was the cautious reply, "but it needs attention. It jumps up and down."

"It what?"

"Well, it turns somersaults and performs—I just found it out. It's this way; you look at me, then it turns over and I—I—that's all."

A slow flush suffused her face.

"I think we'd best begin our fishing," she stated.

"Perhaps that would be best," he replied, though his assent was not hearty.

"And I will take good care not to come too close to you."

"You need not, for I'll be at your heels like a crawling dog."

The stream presently issued from a small canyon where boulders blocked its course and turned it into a foaming, boiling torrent. Jimmy was content to fish for awhile in peace in order that the tumult in his brain, the strange confusion of new knowledge, revelation, wonder and happiness should have time to fall into some kind of order. For probably the first time in his short but palpitating career he felt himself timid, abashed, confronted with circumstances which he could not instantly resolve in an off-hand way; the girl on a sudden assumed a radiant, splendid personality such as he had never perceived any other being to possess. An ineffable longing to be always near her, with her, to make endless the queer happiness which had dropped upon him, stirred so strongly in his heart and agitated him to so great a degree that he did ask himself presently if the altitude had not indeed made him giddy. To assure himself on this point he thumped himself vigorously upon the chest, then listened to see if he could distinguish under the curtain of the river's sound any rattle, any unfamiliar echo, which would reveal a disorder of that newly discovered organ, his heart. He detected nothing—and besides he

knew altitude had nothing whatever to do with the matter. And then what of this chastened dove-like feeling?

"Jimmy Dukane, you've got the little arrow in your bosom at last," he said to himself, with profound conviction.

Meanwhile he had stood so long in reflection that Enid Crofton had passed out of sight around a jutting ledge; he suddenly discovered this with consternation and seizing his pole, the fish basket and the box of lunch began a hurried pursuit. When he came up with her again, he found her busily engaged in a struggle with a large trout which had struck her hook and which was now fighting back and forth in a pool. With infinite skill she was playing it towards the edge where she stood, guiding it away from sharp rocks that might sever the line, keeping a firm control over its wild rushes which made the reel sing, and gradually wearing down its strength.

"Let me help," Dukane exclaimed, in excitement.

"Don't you dare! This is my fish!" came from her tense lips.

Her lithe figure moved backward and forward along the narrow sandy strand, following

the course of the fish. With the flush of battle on her cheek, with eyes bright and alive, she seemed lovelier than ever.

"It's coming, it's coming!" she cried. "Use the landing net!"

Through the limpid water of the pool Jimmy could see a long slim shadow cutting to and fro, or for a moment lying motionless as the fish braced itself against the haling strain of the silk line. Then all at once it shot up above the surface in a curving leap, gleaming in the sunshine and flashing diamonds over the water.

"Three pounds if an ounce," she declared. "Now he's growing tired—get ready."

Cautiously she drew the captive nearer and nearer, until at last Jimmy was able to scoop the net under its body and lift it out of the pool. Surely it was a magnificent trout, and as she had said not an ounce under three pounds. Leaning her rod against the cliff she sat down on a stone to rest.

"He gave me about all I could attend to," she remarked, with the relieved air of one who has fought a good fight and won the victory.

"I'm proud of you, little sister."

Enid burst into a peal of laughter. The proprietary air with which he spoke struck her

as infinitely comic; but her laughter ended in a cry of dismay, for in removing the hook he had allowed the trout to flop out of the net and now it was springing upon the sand in jumps and convulsive bounds in an endeavor to regain the water. Down upon it they both flung themselves, clutching at its slippery body, seeking to seize it, becoming inextricably mixed in a furious mass, until finally they separated to leave Jimmy resting on his knees looking up at her in triumph, while he held the wriggling fish by the gills with a relentless, blood-smeared hand.

"I would have followed it into the water," he said, in glee.

"And I would have made you, if it had got away," she retorted, straightening her hair, "for it would have been your fault. Now put it in the basket and we'll go ahead to that open place yonder under the trees. It's noon and time to eat. If you're not hungry, I am at any rate. We'll roast it over a blaze."

Half an hour later they sat by the embers of a brush-wood fire, with the broiled, succulent trout and their sandwiches spread out on a napkin-covered table of rock between them. The appetizing odor of the fish invited them to feast, the river made music in their ears, the

trees cast a pleasant shade and overhead was the wide, sunlit sky.

"I've fished in Maine, New Hampshire and the Alleghanies, but this beats them all," James remarked.

Enid picked out a fragment of fish with finger and thumb. "Fished in those various places?"

"Yes, and they were no good, except good for the guide who held me up for twenty dollars a day."

"Ah, was that all they charged?"

"Well, that was enough, I think."

"Is that the way you spend your wages in your intervals of rest?" she inquired, politely.

Jimmy came to with a start: he had betrayed himself into a confession which he would have gladly recalled.

"Hum, so to speak."

She finished her morsel, wiped her fingers and calmly asked, "Who is your real self? Who are you?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll tell you. I'm your destined future husband." And he waited in rising excitement the outcome of this bold shot.

"Don't grow silly now."

He leaped to his feet in sudden wrath. "Silly! I'm in dead earnest. That's what's the matter with me, the matter with my heart." He stared wildly at her. "I'm so deeply in love with you that I'd let you cut me up into little pieces for fish-bait and I'd die with joy. I never knew it before, never knew it till to-day. I tell you, if you don't let me love you I'll run mad and bite somebody. Oh, I could weep for love of you." Whereupon he plumped down upon the ground once more, seized a piece of the unoffending trout and began savagely to eat it.

"You're certainly an interesting young man."

"Bear my words in mind, I'm going to marry you," he exclaimed, swallowing a mouthful. "I came out here into the West to find you—I didn't know it at the time, but I know now why I'm marooned here. Just that—because of you. It was fate, and I see now what those old fellows who wrote Greek plays meant when they talked about fate. They meant me."

She spoke impersonally. "You do seem for the moment to be in earnest."

"Earnest!" He raised despairing eyes to

heaven. "I'm in earnest so much that—that—Enid, won't you, can't you love me just a little bit?"

In her heart she experienced a flutter of pity, a gush of sympathy, a responding warmth. His bright black eyes were fixed upon her beseechingly; they held a light such as she had never before seen in them, a light that started a strange sort of rapture into being in her own breast. By an effort, however, she bade him sit down.

"Your fish will grow cold and spoiled," was the only thing she could think of, in response to his impassioned plea.

"What do I care for fish? It's you I want."

"Do you think I could love a man who won't tell me his real name and who makes a mystery of his past?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I did tell you—and besides I took a vow to keep my name secret till I had finished my work. What does the name matter?" he cried impetuously.

Enid had collected herself.

"When a girl is invited into marriage, she rather desires to know what name she will be required to bear the rest of her life—try a sandwich."

"Well, I've determined to marry you, name or no name."

"I don't expect to marry for many, many years, and at the present time I don't love anybody. Why should I?" She flung the question with a bright, smiling look.

Jimmy finished the sandwich on which he was engaged.

"I never thought to propose in the middle of a meal," said he. "Enid, you haven't a heart."

For a time she vouchsafed no reply, only regarding him closely. But her attention was in fact turned inward upon the peculiar singing in her bosom, with a desire to know if the music was in any way in response to the impetuous declaration which had just been made by the young man across the stone from her. Why was she happy now? Why was she always happy when with him? Why did she love to look on his features, to hear his voice, have him near?

"I don't think I could marry you," she said.

"If you—" he stopped abruptly, considering.

For once it seemed as if he were opposed by an unsurmountable obstacle; he looked down

the years to come and saw himself the figure of a lonely tragedy; already it seemed as if he had loved her a long time, almost forever. Moreover, she did not appear to appreciate his passion—she had begun to fold up the napkins. He helped himself to one of the two remaining sandwiches, bit into and sorrowfully masticated the bite. Then he began to reflect upon the advisability of telling her his real identity, yet what was to be gained by that? If she did not love him as Hemple, she would not love him as Dukane. He heaved a profound sigh. And to remain in the valley knowing he had no hope would be torture. Let Corbetson continue to graft in the building of the dam—let him go scot-free—he, Jimmy Dukane, cared not.

“Well, I shall go away, then,” he stated, at last.

“Go away!”

“Yes.”

“But you mustn’t do that,” she hastened to say, with an inexpressible flutter of apprehension.

“No use in staying if you don’t love me.”

“If you went, I’d know you’d been driven away by me.”

"Not at all."

She carefully wrapped up the napkins. A tiny wrinkle appeared between her brows.

"You must promise not to go until you have a real reason for doing so."

"If I haven't a good one now, I'll never have it."

"That's no reason at all. Will you promise?"

Jimmy, however, would not commit himself to any such rash agreement. The prospect held out of a future near her and yet apart from her was more than he cared to accept; better be utterly out of her presence. It was thus while he believed his fortunes at their lowest ebb that in reality they were rising, as with his announcement of a possible departure he had created in her mind a possibility of loss.

Fishing down the stream on their way homeward, and fishing less with an eye to a full creel than as a mere form of keeping up the pretense of the excursion, conversation lagged while each engaged in introspection. So far as Enid was concerned she knew by this time that she was exceedingly fond of him, but as for really loving him—that was a vastly different matter. He was fishing ahead and pres-

ently she became so absorbed in contemplation of her loving any man that she remained apparently rooted in one spot, oblivious of the fact that the end of her pole trailed in the water, a full danger-signal to any trout which lurked in the pool. And always her thoughts focused in the end upon the personality of the youth, his sudden appearance in Silver Peak Basin, his rescue of her at the dam, his coming to her house, his obvious superiority to his present station, his friendship and kindness for the cripple, his mystery, his danger at the hands of the camp bully, and now his present confession of love. At last she was aroused by his hallooing for her. When she joined him, he stated that he feared she had fallen into the river.

"I found a good pool," was her brief answer.

"And where are the fish?"

"They didn't bite."

"Well, I wouldn't call that a good pool."

Below them they could see the outspread basin, the ranch, the construction works at the mouth of the gorge and distinguish faint jets of steam escaping from the power house. All the valley basked in afternoon sunshine, under

which the river glistened at intervals in plates of silver.

"You mustn't go away," she said.

"That's kind, but you'll not be lonesome, with Leschelles and Satterfield and Corbetson. The doctor too is always glad to fill in."

"But I should miss you."

"Ah, that's something. Look here, if I stay I'd be tempted some fine day to drive up to your house with my six-horse outfit and kidnap you. It wouldn't be exactly as romantic as riding in an old-fashioned English stage, but it would do. You'd have to be responsible for what happened."

Enid laughed at the picture he drew.

"Father and the boys would be after us shooting at every jump."

"So much the better, it would make it vivid." The contemplation of happiness, even under such difficulties, lighted Dukane's face with a beatific smile. "I will do it—I will do it! They could never catch us when I started pouring the whip into my steeds—and we'd have a good start. Then we could be married at Melton, then go round the world on a wedding trip, then live in New York and—" Her clear laughter interrupted his dream and brought

him back to reality. "I'm in earnest," he continued. "If I stay—and now I think I shall—I'll do something desperate to win you."

"That will be exciting, and I sometimes long for excitement."

"Oh, if you knew how I love you!" he exclaimed, with a fresh burst of sentiment, waving his rod wildly about.

The next five minutes were occupied by him in attempting to untangle the line from the limbs of a sapling in which it had become wrapped, until at last he jerked it furiously loose.

"This does not seem to be your lucky day," Enid remarked.

"Lucky, I should say not! I've been living a dog's life under an unlucky star ever since the governor sent me that telegram in—" Abruptly he broke off, conscious that he was betraying himself, then finished lamely, "I think the goblins are on my trail. They'll be jumping up and down on me nights pretty soon to keep me awake. I'm through with fishing for to-day."

"And I have had enough too. Let us start home."

As they followed a path that descended the

river, she questioned him regarding his feud with the camp bully, Lantry. But of this he would not speak: natural pride and principle that a man's fight with men should be maintained as a personal affair, to be neither disclosed to nor discussed with those of the other sex,—a rule unconsciously absorbed from that stern fighter, Dukane senior—caused him to refuse all of her inquiries and evade her leads upon the subject. Lantry and he did not agree, was his explanation, that was the whole of the matter. And though highly dissatisfied and excited to a higher point of curiosity than ever, she needs must be content. Of the attack and counter-attack which had been made between them the previous night, and of the acute stage to which their hostility had in consequence been developed, she knew nothing, or she would have experienced a new perturbation in Dukane's behalf.

This was not long delayed. When they reached the ranch house they found the little doctor sitting upon the veranda with Mr. Crofton, and the four of them chatted for a time upon general topics.

Presently Mr. Crofton said:

"The doctor tells me that you and that fel-

low Lantry had a bad mix-up last night, and that he's out to capture your scalp, Jim. Better go easy around him."

"All he has to do to have peace is to leave Spencer and me alone," Jimmy replied.

The doctor hitched about with hands on knees.

"You young fellows certainly came back at him with a vengeance. Had to take half a dozen stitches in one chap's head and he looked as if he'd been run through the stone crusher—black-and-blue all over. There's a lot of tough trouble ahead of you, I'm afraid, my boy—wish you were well out of it, or that Lantry would quit camp."

"What has Mr. Hemple been doing this time?" Enid demanded.

The doctor chuckled, eying Dukane.

"That would be telling secrets out of school."

Enid seated herself and began fanning resolutely. She looked from one to another of the men, who showed no disposition to convey the information requested.

"You may as well tell me, Doctor, for I intend to find out," she stated. "If you won't, then father will have to, so I'll learn it in any case."

"Hemple could probably give you the facts better than I—also the atmosphere. But I'll go ahead; I can't refuse you anything you ask, as you know, and so I'm in your power. Hemple's scowling now. Of course I'll catch it from him going home—he's a modest young man in some ways, though not many. It seems that Lantry and two friends met James here last night and knocked him down as a form of amusement, but James was not subdued. Far from it! He called his clan and in their turn they fell on poor Lantry and the other pair and beat them up in worse shape than could a squad of New York policemen. They're so sore physically and mentally to-day that they can't work and can only plot revenge. I'd say that Jimmy has opened up a lead for the real celebration of his life. Wisdom should dictate an orderly retreat."

"Not me," Jimmy replied, promptly.

"But if you're in danger!" Enid exclaimed.

"I've nothing to live for in any case," he retorted, with significance. "I'll fight Lantry to a finish, then the company can bury me in a cement sack. Thus I would make an appropriate end."

"I'll offer my services to sew you up," the doctor offered.

"How dare you talk so!" Enid said, with a rising flush. "That's horrible. I think something should be done to stop it."

"I don't want it stopped," Jimmy announced.

"Then you deserve to be killed," was her angry reply.

"Oh, Lantry's a coward at bottom," the youth said, in lofty tones.

Although the subject was presently changed her anxious thoughts continued to dwell upon it, inventing all sorts of terrible agonies and tortures which the gorgon Lantry might inflict upon the body of his victim. The boy loved her; even if she did not love him she nevertheless now had an intimate responsibility in him because of that love, a personal pledge for his welfare. What did that man Corbetson mean by permitting such outrageous conduct on the part of Lantry? Why, indeed, did he keep him as a workman? Perhaps she should have been gentler with Hemple when he told her of his love. She ran over in memory all the circumstances of the day, all of his words, recalled his every look, tone and gesture; and contrast-

ing them with her own saw herself in a cold and unsympathetic light. She had in truth been over-cold.

"And this newspaper man states that the son has vanished utterly," the doctor was saying. "He questioned everybody in camp, myself among them. During the afternoon he spent an hour with me. The strange part of the story is that this young Dukane, who by all accounts was a high-flier and worthless chap, disappeared over yonder at Melton—was in fact coming to inspect the dam. He never showed up, just dropped out of sight—sank into the ground."

Jimmy stirred uneasily.

"These rich men's sons are never any good," said he.

"Well, old man Dukane's wasn't, that seems pretty well certified to. The reporter intends to hang round a day or two, says he can work up an article on the construction of the dam even if he can't make a story about Dukane's son."

Mr. Crofton lighted a fresh cigar and cast a satisfied look at his daughter.

"Boys make a heap of trouble sometimes. Now with a girl it's different; all that you have

to do is to let them have their way and there is never any disagreement."

"What a thing to say!" she rejoined, then, "Must you go, gentlemen?" For the doctor and Jimmy had risen. "I hope no sounds of battle from camp will keep father and me awake to-night."

She spoke gaily, but as she addressed her good-nights to them she found occasion to add a word to her companion of the afternoon.

"Take care of yourself, Jimmy," she said softly, "I want you to."

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER THE CHIEF'S THUMB

THE matter which had lain troublesomely on Enid's mind came to the surface the day after the fishing excursion and gave a push to affairs to a degree that resulted in young Dukane being advanced a considerable space towards his object of solving the dam mystery. Indeed, coming at the time it did when his whole course seemed hopelessly blocked, and in the manner in which it did as a consequence of Corbetson's own initiative, one might have concluded that there was an unseen and powerful intelligence at work in his behalf. To go back to the girl's perturbation, it had to do with the circumstance of Jimmy's veiled warfare with Lantry, the bunk-house bully; the information given her by the cowboys concerning the feud persisted in her mind. Therefore it was only natural that it should at last acquire substance in the form of speech.

"There are some pretty rough specimens of men in camp, I suppose," she said reflectively, to the chief engineer when he was calling.

"Oh, to be sure, Miss Crofton, they drift to a project like this."

"Some of the boys here on the ranch were saying that a fellow by the name of Lantry, one of the worst, created a good deal of trouble, fighting and quarreling and bullying his bunk-house mates. Isn't there any way to get rid of such a brute?"

"One must look at it in the right way—or rather not look at it at all, for they are all pretty much brute at bottom. They fight out their troubles and seem to abide by the trial of strength. During working-hours if they attend to their jobs and earn their pay, that's all we ask; after hours they're their own masters and everyone of them would resent interference with their liberty, even though it be a quarrelsome liberty."

"But it isn't right that a bully like that man Lantry should be allowed to torment a cripple like Hop Spencer, a harmless fellow,—and he would be doing it all the time if it wasn't that Mr. Hemple defended the latter. Now Lan-

try threatens, so the boys here say, to injure them both."

"What do you want me to do?" Corbetson inquired, frowning, secretly vexed.

"Well, I'd think an order from you would make the rougher ones respect others' rights."

"Hemple seems, by all accounts, to go half way in the quarrels—still if you ask me, Miss Crofton, I'll do everything in my power to accomplish what you wish."

"Mr. Hemple doesn't matter," she stated, with an assumed indifference, "it's that poor club-footed chap."

But Corbetson's suspicious mind was not easily deceived; he read her interest in the irrepressible Hemple, distorted it, magnified it, until his spirit gnawed at itself in a fever. What she could see in the young laborer to interest her was beyond his imagining; every characteristic of the boy, his looks, his impudent manner, his incorrigible insubordination, his brazen assurance, his conceited speech, rasped his nerves and set his teeth on edge; every visit the youth made to the Crofton ranch he considered an intrusion and every bright look elicited from the girl's eyes one robbed

from himself. But he was too cunning to exhibit his real feelings for her inspection.

"I'll do my best to place the cripple and Hemple where Lantry cannot interfere with them," he said, in conclusion.

It was therefore with secret satisfaction that he hit upon a plan which would at once remove his unworthy rival from the field and at the same time give him, Corbetson, the appearance of performing a friendly act. Calling Dukane to his office next morning he announced that he appointed him to the position of assistant-storekeeper; Pennick's health was bad and a helper was necessary, while the berth carried with it an increased salary, namely eighty-five dollars.

Jimmy regarded him from under questioning brows. That the chief did not like him had been only too evident since the first day he set foot in camp; therefore this philanthropy was only on the surface; therefore Corbetson by this move imagined something to be gained. To Jimmy's disadvantage of course! Though he was certain that such was the case he could not at once lay a finger upon the man's motive; it would no doubt transpire unpleasantly in the near future. As for the storekeeper, that in-

dividual's health was undoubtedly bad; Jimmy had observed this very hour in passing to the office that Pennick who sat in a chair in the door was exceedingly "jumpy" from steady potations out of a private jug which he kept.

"Well, how about it?" Corbetson inquired, interrupting his speculations.

"I'll take the job."

"Very well, begin at once. That is all, Mr. Hemple."

"Thank you, chief."

A flash of recognition of the splendid opportunities which would be afforded for private investigation in this new position prompted him to accept. The finer points of loyalty and honor here concerned did not weaken his firm purpose to search out the secret of the cement; had they been suggested by a third person he would have looked at the man in astonishment. Corbetson was grafting somewhere; that was sufficient reason for making every effort to unmask the chief and to seize every advantage. Certainly, he reflected as he turned into the store, he could now make headway—"get action."

Half an hour later he was displaying a pair of overalls to a prospective purchaser

while his superior and new master drowsed in a chair.

"Those are unquestionably the finest trousers on the market," Hemple remarked, head on one side, extended hands exhibiting the humble garment. "They are cut in the latest London fashion, are guaranteed never to wear out or lose the crease and are, my noble patron, the acme of elegance."

"Cut out the funny business and wrap 'em up," the buyer growled.

Dukane received the price, handed over the package and watched the other depart. Then he helped himself to a cigar out of the showcase and pondered certain facts which he had already discovered in his new situation.

In reality these were rather clues than facts; and a certain lively suspicion had taken shape in his mind that it was not Dukane and Company who were responsible for the high prices charged the workmen for merchandise, but the storekeeper and behind him Corbetson. The store did a pretty heavy volume of business, there was no doubt of that. What had aroused first his attention, then his doubt of the honesty of the storekeeper, was a singular system of book-keeping being practiced in the establish-

ment. On a desk at the rear of the store he had seen two ledgers lying side by side open at the same page in each; dates and entries of one William Kenner's account ran identical in each book, but the prices charged for the articles were wholly at variance; and a swift comparison on his part showed that one book carried item by item a hundred per cent increase. He turned to his own account in the books; the same fact held true. One did not represent cost to the company, for costs were not kept in that fashion. What therefore did it mean? At the first opportunity he resolved to ransack the proprietor's letter files for statements of the business, for reports, for anything which would throw light on the subject. This must be done secretly, silently and without arousing suspicion; and the best means of doing this was what he revolved in his mind as he sat upon the counter smoking and swinging his legs.

His meditations were interrupted by the appearance of the newspaper correspondent, the man of Melton acquaintance, who entered the door, pausing a moment to survey the storekeeper who now slept stertorously with head on one side and jaw fallen, then advanced to the new clerk.

"How goes the search?" Jimmy inquired amiably, offering the man a cigar.

The correspondent eyed both Dukane and the cigar with questioning doubt, though finally accepting the weed and lighting it. He seated himself on a chair face to face with the youth.

"You are a young devil," he said. "First you send me into a scrape over at the town on the railroad, then you no more than reach here when you start an insurrection and beat up three workmen with a gang you've organized, and now you sit here as innocent as if you knew nothing but how to wrap up packages of tea. What are you going to start next?"

"I am an opportunist: I follow no policy in my campaign."

"A fellow who stirs up deviltry never does."

"All right, let it go at that," Jimmy said. "What about the missing heir you're tracking down? Found his dead body yet?"

"No—and after my experiences in that hotel I want no more suggestions from you where to look for it."

"I've a new theory that—"

"Never mind, I don't want it. The young fellow never came here, that's settled in my own mind. He was probably drunk the night he

got off the train—if he did get off—and he just disappeared like a thousand other men. Some day his bones will turn up and they will be identified as his by the gold in his teeth, or a collar-button, or some such nonsense.” And so saying he thrust his hands into his trousers’ pockets, straightened his legs and gazed pessimistically at the floor.

“If you want a body for purposes of identification, I’ll go out and kill someone,” Jimmy offered, obligingly.

“A little more and you’d have done it last night. The big fellow is pretty badly bruised—and he’s mixing war medicine.”

“Humph,” said Dukane, scratching his cheek thoughtfully.

All the indications pointed to a brewing storm in the Lantry quarter. First, the Doctor had given him warning, now the reporter, while the general atmosphere of the camp seemed surcharged with excitement as a result of the encounter. Plenty of men there were who had slapped him on the back with hearty commendation for his treatment of the ruffian, men who themselves had suffered under Lantry’s petty tyranny and who in consequence hated him, but whether their hatred would go

further than words he doubted. He must trust to his own nimble wits and to the loyalty of the few who had stood by him. Lantry would brood wrathfully until at last he thought to take Dukane unawares, when he should be able to mete out punishment to his brutal heart's satisfaction. The next battle would be more serious.

"Well, I think I'll walk over to Tunneltown and then to the canal camp," the correspondent stated, yawning; "might run across some trace of young Dukane there, but it's not likely. I can get back here by night. Two or three days here will give me stuff for a story on the irrigation project."

"If there's anything the chief can't tell you, come to me."

"You're the real thing, I know," was the sardonic answer.

"Sure, come around any time."

"When that big scrapper finishes you, you won't be so swelled on yourself. Here's hoping he does it soon, for you're an insufferable cub at present."

"Try and be on hand when it happens," Jimmy called after him, genially.

This first day in the store was, as it turned

out, destined to be an epochal one in the young man's affairs; for in addition to the correspondent he had another and more inspiring visitor. He was an ordinary gentleman, a man of that smooth-faced, middle-sized, mild, unobtrusive type who, because of modesty of person and dress, is able to move among any order of men in which its members chance to find themselves and attract no attention—a chameleon-like quality of value upon occasion. At present the man would have been taken to be a workman of the better class, but still a workman; and such indeed Dukane judged him to be, since he wore a working shirt, dusty felt hat and carried his coat upon his arm.

“Let me look at a pair of boots,” he said, after a casual glance towards the rear where the leather stock was stored.

Jimmy led him thither and displayed several pair carelessly.

“Is your name Hemple?” the man asked, squinting at a boot, which he held up to the light.

“Yes, you’ve got it.”

The man handed him a paper and continued his examination with the air of a sober, industrious toiler who is anxious to get his money’s

worth. The sheet of paper revealed itself to the youth as none other than the letter which he had dispatched to the Corson Cement Company; with a memorandum from the manager in reply upon the margin stating that the bearer had been dispatched as requested and was at the informant's service, was in fact the company's assistant manager. Jimmy folded the letter and placed it in his bosom with a sudden feeling of puffed-upness: recognition was at last coming his way. He glanced at the man, but the latter continued to inspect the boot, turning it over and around as if genuinely interested.

"Come with me," the youth said, and led the visitor out the rear door. "Go up the river until you come to a log in a clump of trees—about half a mile. We mustn't be seen together. I'll join you presently."

The man considered a moment, felt of his pockets.

"I'm out of cigars," said he.

"I'll bring them," Jimmy cried, impatient at the fellow's calm matter-of-factness, now that an exciting moment had arrived.

For the youth's pulses were bounding, his mind was on fire, his soul athirst with the vista

of possibilities which had been all at once opened up by this unexpected arrival of the cement company's representative. Truth to tell Dukane had been too busy of late to remember this particular coil which he had cast out beyond the horizon.

Half an hour later, after informing his drowsing employer of his intended absence, he had scooted out the same door through which he had led the stranger, had followed to the appointed spot. They sat side by side on the log.

"It's an extraordinary condition you make," the man was saying.

"May sound like it, but I must have your promise that nothing is to be said of what you find out and nothing done, until I give the word."

The man scrutinized him.

"I don't know yet but what the whole matter will turn out to be a mare's nest."

Jimmy resolved upon a master-stroke, a stroke that would absolutely seal the other's lips.

"You've heard of young Dukane?" he asked.

"Who hasn't? the papers have been full of his disappearance."

"Well, I'm him," was the calm rejoinder.

"You!"

"Sure, me. I'm investigating on the quiet."

"But your father's company—your father? All this outcry?"

"That's the joke of it. The governor sent me here to make a report, thought I was no good. I happened to be robbed and my clothes stolen and I was hauled over here as a bum to work, under the name of Hemple. First thing I saw some rotten work with the cement, so I decided to wear the alias and investigate in fact. It's fine, wouldn't have missed it for a pot of money! That's why I say you've got to go by my orders."

The man looked at the end of his cigar, "How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Do you want to know whether your Company's being defrauded or do you not!" Jimmy exclaimed in exasperation. "You ought to be willing to take a sporting chance."

"I've nothing to lose, that's a fact. All right, son, I go under your orders. You want to open father's eyes, I see."

Dukane leaped to his feet in excitement as the prospect of his stern parent coming to him full of remorse for past harsh measures expanded rosily in his mind.

"I certainly do—I certainly do! I want him to see me standing on top of the dam, with this crooked chief in chains at my feet."

A smile flickered across the other's face at this Romanesque picture.

"You're the lost child, I guess. That sort of talk fits in with the general description of young Dukane."

"Bah! don't believe it. The newspapers tried to make me out half a fool, half a tough—I wasn't either, though it's a fact I used to like to get action on my money. And I do yet. But here are the facts about the cement mystery."

Under the pledge of secrecy which he bestowed anew he related the circumstance of the exchange of cement from one set of sacks to the other as he had witnessed the transfer during his first day in Melton, and as it had no doubt regularly occurred often since. Moreover he communicated his serious suspicions regarding the fraudulent dam construction.

"No honest dam is built in such fashion," the man stated, after listening attentively. "I'll have a look at it. How can it escape the inspector? Or is he crooked too?"

"He hasn't put in an appearance yet—but

stop! I remember now that a man did come, who made the rounds for a day or two—that was when I was shoveling at the mixer. There was a thin layer of concrete filled in over the rubble to give it the appearance of solidity.”

“And the assistant engineers?”

“They’re straight, straight as strings. But they believe they’re working under approved plans, though they know the plans to be bad. That’s all in the world that keeps them here, Mr. Kendle; they consider themselves under orders like soldiers.”

“I know how that goes.”

Kendle lighted a fresh cigar, nursed his knee a long time in silence, while his brow remained knit.

“Between Dukane and Company and the inspector on the one hand and these engineers on the other, the fraud ought to show up in the blue-prints—unless—”

“Unless what?” Jimmy encouraged.

“Could this Corbetson be working two sets, a straight one for the inspector and a spurious one for his assistants?”

“By heaven!” gasped Jimmy.

“Well, you’re in a position to see—or rather oversee,” Kendle quietly suggested.

"And I will see, or my name shall never change from Hemple!"

For a time Kendle puffed and eyed the restless youth. A shade less of impersonality showed in his manner, a shade more of friendliness. To himself he must have admitted, had the question arisen in his mind, that this new acquaintance was somewhat startling and no doubt would under other circumstances be rather trying.

"This business ought to establish you in the good graces of Dukane and Company," he offered, as mild flattery.

Jimmy halted sharply in his pacing.

"What's that! Establish! It looks to me after the botch the company's made of it, letting this two-for-a-quarter Corbetson pilfer their pockets in such a fashion, that it's up to them to establish themselves in my good graces. They don't want to try any patronizing talk with me. They'll have come to me about dams as they'd come to an expert."

"Ah, I hadn't considered that view."

"No, and probably they haven't, but they'll have to come to it, for I'm going to build this dam. Up till now Corbetson hasn't done enough damage but what can be easily repaired,

if I can get him out in time." Under stress of this new and pressing necessity Jimmy once more took to pacing up and down the river bank, occasionally passing a hand across his brow with a perplexed air. "It's this way," he continued. "The dam goes up slowly, each form has to harden. During the time I've been here it's gone up a few feet, for it's a big work you know. Well, if I can catch him with the goods pretty soon now, I can have the men jump in and tear out all the rubble and thin stuff he's spread over it and then we shall fill up the empty forms with genuine reinforced concrete which won't cause much loss or delay. I've got it all figured out how I'll do it." His stride fell into a more meditative step. "Since they build up alternate forms, it will—by Jove, I believe that thief has been stealing the railroad rails that ought to have gone in to reinforce the concrete! Why, there isn't enough steel in that shell to make a common theatre trunk!"

This new discovery was cause for a fresh torrent of anathemas which were directed in swift succession at the person of the chief. That Jimmy had not until now discovered this additional theft augmented in his mind the degree

and nature of the sin. He at last cooled down, however, when his companion informed him that he had been absent from the store something over an hour and that wisdom dictated that they should for the present separate.

"I'll examine the dam myself," Kendle said, "return to Melton to watch the station agent, ride to a station east or west and telegraph my company to start someone out to run down the office, the plant and history of this Roseland concern."

A sudden inspiration struck the youth.

"Old man Roseland lives west here only twenty miles. Go see him yourself."

"Very well—and then?"

"Report to me."

Kendle laughed and said ironically, "I'll do so, my young master."

"That's right, I'm the boss. I'm up against a stone wall in obtaining this information from the outside and so need you, but I'm running the affair just the same as if I hadn't called your company to my aid."

"Don't rub it in."

"Well, bear the fact in mind just the same," Jimmy stated, significantly.

During the afternoon of that day the young

clerk standing at intervals in the store door imagined he saw his newly-acquired ally moving among the workmen on the dam, but considering the distance that he was gazing and the fact that the men were indistinguishable he concluded his eyes were playing him tricks. Further, he decided that he liked Kendle. About the latter person there was nothing officious, he reflected, or forward, or presuming, or self-assertive, or egotistical, or anything of that sort which rubbed a fellow the wrong way and stirred up one's antagonism. They should get along together famously.

The real business of the day, so far as the store was concerned, began after supper when the laborers were at leisure to make purchases, to inquire as to their accounts, or to call for mail. Articles of apparel were in heavy demand, since from the rough character of the work in which the men were engaged, clothes were speedily worn out, while accidents and mishaps increased their naturally rapid wear and tear. For the most part the purchasers were easily satisfied, but as there was a steady stream of them demanding everything from chewing tobacco to boots both Dukane and the proprietor were allowed no interval of rest.

By ten o'clock, however, the rush was over and the proprietor retired to his bedroom, telling Jimmy to wait until eleven, when he should close up.

"Is this the regular thing every night?" the youth inquired, with a sudden suspicion filling his mind.

"Yes, pretty much the same," Pennick answered.

Jimmy brooded. "That is why Corbetson wanted me in here," he declared vengefully, "so I couldn't call at the ranch, wanted to get me out of the way. Oh, the double-dyed villain, the black-hearted scoundrel, the unbaked conspirator! I'll cut his throat yet! To keep me from seeing the sweetest angel that ever trod God's green—"

He cut off his utterance abruptly at the appearance of the newspaper correspondent who once more entered the building. The man advanced with a fine air of assurance, despite the glare which Dukane gave him on account of interrupting the tender climax of his soliloquy.

"Say, young fellow, an idea just struck me," the correspondent stated.

"Then save it, for you need what few you get," was the withering reply.

The reporter held forth a hand.

"Let me see your left arm."

"What for?"

"I saw a birth-mark on it near the elbow this morning. Just remembered that young Dukane was described as having one. You had your sleeves rolled up, but I didn't notice yours particularly. Let me see it."

A thrill of fear shot through Jimmy. Was this inquisitive news-purveyor going to discover his identity at last and blare it to the world? Were all his plans to be ruined?

"Shame on you, I lost my left arm in the war," he bluffed.

"I want to see that birth-mark."

"Yes, I'm covered with 'em like a leopard. Get out or I'll decorate your face," Dukane exclaimed savagely.

"But why—"

Leaping down, Jimmy rushed at him. The man melted into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST MOVE IN THE PLOT

MEANWHILE on the surface of things work went forward with its accustomed vigor. Across the basin the stone crusher roared and rumbled, stamping out a great heap of fine fresh white rock; from this the mixer fed, adding its coarse note to the resounding medley of machinery and water, its great octagonal barrel revolving incessantly from early morn till noon, from noon till evening; men swarmed over the dam site, building new forms, clearing away cliff sides, handling concrete; from Melton Miller's train of wagons hauled endless loads. The evidence of patient persistence, of a slow winning to victory, which manifested itself throughout and directed the work on every hand to a definite end, caused young Dukane to ponder, comprehend and pay unspoken tribute to the mighty organization which his father had created. Corbetson alone had turned out to be the cog with a flaw.

All unknowing the reflections of which he formed the subject the chief engineer was having ever increased worries, an ever added burden of anxiety. Like a plant in a cellar, a secret grows towards the light. An evil secret so strives most incessantly of all. If there be any one thing that inevitably points as proof that man was born to do what is fundamentally right it is this extraordinary evidence of the workings of a man's own mind to reveal his crimes. Corbetson was beginning to realize that ill-gotten gains are always dearly paid for; for his he was paying in constant worry, fears, sleeplessness; but like most criminals, now that he was fairly launched on his dishonest course, he only the more resolved to follow it to the end and reap its fruits. His friend, his companion, his solace, during the nights when he was alone, when his thoughts were no longer occupied by the various business demands of the day, was his bottle. More and more frequently he had recourse to it; and with the coming of midnight he had generally drunk a pint or so of the whiskey and won that misty peace of mind which would enable him to sleep.

A new fear had come to clutch at his heart.

Ever since he had received his warning telegram from Pittsburg of the coming of the inspector, when in consequence he had required the loose core of stone to be coated over with a false layer of concrete, giving it an appearance of solidity, his two assistants had been "cold" on the work of construction. To them he had represented it as orders from San Francisco; they believed Dukane and Company "grafting" and their sense of honesty was sickened at this new knowledge; and Corbetsen seriously doubted if they would submit to further acquiescence in such a palpable fraud, dreaded lest they resign. Such action on their part would cause the coast office to ask them for reasons—and neither Satterfield nor Leschelles, once having made the move, would hesitate to give them as well as their opinions of such character of work. And then the chief's fat would be in the fire! Yes, Corbetsen had cause to worry and tremble at shadows, since behind the shadows were solid persons.

Dukane, studying the man from the vantage afforded by being under the same roof, soon perceived that the chief was always stealthily on guard; and now since the idea had been put into the boy's head by Kendle that possibly

Corbetson was playing a hidden game with two sets of maps, Jimmy swiftly found an explanation for such ceaseless vigilance. The incriminating maps were the things to lay hands on, but naturally this particular work was attended by greatest difficulty. He would have to await his chance. And therefore he set himself meanwhile to work to ferret out the lesser "graft," that of the store.

That night, when Pennick, the storekeeper, was fast asleep, Jimmy stooped with ear to his employer's keyhole to listen to his snores; then the youth began a search for evidence. Because he knew nothing whatever of bookkeeping and business the task was all the more perplexing; but undismayed he carried armloads of letter-files, bill-cases and accounts into his own sleeping-closet, where with window heavily curtained against possible "peepers," he burrowed manfully through the mass. At last he came upon a number of statements and weekly reports to the San Francisco office's accountant which betrayed the plot. Jimmy laid a finger on his nose and gloated like a cunning notary in a melodrama. These reports purported to show the store selling merchandise to the workmen at cost, plus freight and

operating expense; whereas, in reality (Jimmy's agile mind calculated it on the instant) Corbetson and Pennick were dishonestly making a hundred per cent. profit for their own pockets. It was all clear, all simple. Three o'clock marked the face of the tin clock before Dukane restored the files and retired virtuously to his bed, a new plan buzzing in his brain. At last, in a jumbled phantasmagoria of dreams in which whirled Corbetson and Enid Crofton and Kendle and the reporter, maps and reports and bags of cement and creels of trout, he fell into a heavy sleep.

About eleven o'clock next morning Enid Crofton herself walked into the emporium where our young hero leaned against a counter staring into space and meditating the numerous matters which now filled his bounding life to capacity.

"I heard you were here," said she, drawing off her gauntlets. "This work is much more suited to your capabilities than are shoveling rock and driving freight-teams. It was kind of Mr. Corbetson to take an interest in you."

"The chief is a dear," said he, ironically.

"That speech is disrespectful and ungrateful."

Jimmy placed a chair for her.

"Do you mean to tell me that you believe old Corbetson put me here out of kindness?" he inquired.

"If not, what? And you shouldn't speak of him as old—he's not so old, you know."

But Jimmy was frankly sceptical. "Forty may not be old for a would-be husband, but still it's where a man can look down the other side of the hill. I'll tell you why he put me here; because of you."

"I did ask him to move you and Hop Spencer where that ruffian Lantry and his men couldn't hurt you."

At this bit of news a hot flush colored Jimmy's face. His eyes flashed indignantly; violent thoughts coursed and re-coursed through his mind. His sturdy figure swelled with resentment at such unsolicited aid which put him in the light of being afraid of Lantry.

"You did that, did you!" he exclaimed. "If you think I'd cringe before that scoundrel you ought to take a look at him since I finished beating him to pieces. Lantry hurt me? Well, I guess not!"

"He's a dangerous man."

"He doesn't think he's half as dangerous as he used to."

"But it would be a shame if those ruffians who're in the habit of fighting should—"

The youth dismissed the unfinished remark with a wave of the hand.

"I can take care of Mr. Hemple," said he. "So you spoke to the chief—but that wasn't what I meant when I said he moved me here on account of you. It was to put me out of the running, the old scamp! He knew that I'd be so busy here in the store nights that I'd never get away to call upon you. That man's a villain if there ever was one."

"How absurd you are."

"Believe it or not, as you will, I speak the truth. The chief is jealous of anyone who looks at you except himself."

Enid sat up, creasing her gloves rapidly.

"You forget, Mr. Hemple, that we quarreled one time on this very subject. We'd best not mention it again."

Dukane gloomed a moment, then brightened.

"That's agreeable to me. I'll recite my own tale of love for you; I've thought of a million

new things to tell you about it that you'd love to hear. I—"

"You're too impetuous," said she, rising.

"Do you want a lover who resembles a cold potato?" was his ardent rejoinder.

"I don't want any lover at all."

"Well, you've got one and that's all there is about it," Jimmy stated conclusively, shoving his hands into his pockets. "When I start for a thing I never quit; I go ahead until I win or am knocked on the pate. You'll have to decide one way or the other in the end, take me or kill me, for I'm your relentless lover. I sit up nights reading Tennyson's Enid over and over; I lean out of my window under the stars of night gazing towards the spot where you dwell. Why, I have—"

Enid once more sat down. "When you've finished and regained a calm state of mind, I'll buy a box of chocolates."

While pretending to ignore his impassioned words she was not only not averse to them, but enjoyed them keenly. They started a responsive thrill in her breast, the flash of his eyes bespoke sincerity and she experienced anew the rapture which she had known when he voiced the same thoughts beside the river.

"Chocolates—oh, ye heavens!" he cried in despair. "A girl would think of chocolates if she were on her way to Paradise." He brought a beribboned box from a case and placed it in her hand.

She rose, looked about the store. An irresistible impulse moved her, a wayward, audacious impulse.

"Shut your eyes," she commanded.

"Why?"

"Shut them—and promise to keep them shut while you count one hundred."

"But—"

"Will you?" She gave an impatient little stamp of her foot.

Jimmy obeyed. Suddenly two hands caught his cheeks, suddenly on his lips was imprinted the softest, warmest, sweetest kiss in the world, then as his eyes despite his promise popped open there was a scamper of skirts, a spring of a light figure into the saddle and the swift retreat of hoofbeats.

The youth stood as one who had been kissed by a goddess and now was turned to marble. Had the heavens been rent asunder before his eyes he could not have been more dum-

founded, more transfixed in delicious ecstasy. Then all at once he dashed to the door and out into the open; but all he perceived was her figure on that of her pony flying up the river road. He drew an abstracted hand across his brow.

"She doesn't hate me at any rate," he exclaimed.

When he returned inside he drew forth the longest cigar in the showcase, for this extraordinary miracle needed profound thought, and promptly went into a brown study in the midst of a cloud of smoke. From time to time inarticulate sounds could have been heard issuing from his lips, sounds which might have represented words but which carried with them no intelligibility.

From this condition he slowly emerged when Kendle presented himself before him. The dam was all that Dukane had stated it to be, he remarked, which was a fraud; he was now ready to proceed to Melton and carry on his investigations from that point. Jimmy leaped down from his perch and caught him by the elbow, speaking dramatically into his ear.

"But that will let us into a lot of trouble," Kendle protested, in answer to the youth's proposal.

"Not a speck. The man's a coward, an ar-rant coward."

Then once more he poured forth his plan, all the while gripping Kendle's elbow as in a vice, brushing aside scruples, beating down objections, sweeping the man forward by the very vehemence of his speech, until perforce he agreed.

"You're on the high road to crime yourself," Kendle announced, "but I've agreed to back you up and I will. Hope we don't get shot in the act."

"Shot nothing! If there's any shooting I'll do it myself. Try a fresh cigar." Jimmy made very free with the company's tobacco.

The rest of that day was one of impatience for Dukane. An intense desire possessed him to see Enid Crofton once more, while a vexatious worriment at the laggard passing of the hours until the moment when he should put into execution the first move in his active campaign against Corbetson fretted his spirit. The chief, Jimmy perceived, was well pleased with the success of his stratagem in enticing the

youth into a position where he was forced to abandon his evening visits to the ranch-house. Indeed, the man with an outward display of interest entered the store to inquire how Dukane liked the new work. Jimmy, who would not be triumphed over, gritted his teeth and grinned as if he were wholly abandoned to joy. He pronounced it fine, splendid, grand; he stated that he had longed all his life to be a counter-jumper; he could now die happy. This reply Corbetson received suspiciously, but as he could not at the moment conceive how Dukane could circumvent him in the affair of Enid Crofton he departed still well content.

Jimmy shook his fist behind the man's back, pronouncing unutterable threats. One does not enjoy being made a mock, and such Corbetson sought to make of him. But Enid had kissed him—him—Jimmy Hemple! Oh, he would have loved to tell the man that! What jealousy it would have stirred in the chief's breast, what a rage in his heart! And with such comfort as this thought gave him the youth fiercely set to work to pile in order a tumbled mass of overalls.

It seemed as if he was not yet at an end of

being tormented. The correspondent put his head in the door.

"Ready to let me see that arm?" he demanded.

"Move on, you're no surgeon," Jimmy retorted.

"Nevertheless, my son, I intend to have a look at it."

The clerk ceased his labor.

"Come ahead, if you think you're able," he exclaimed, belligerently.

"Not this morning, but soon. I don't pose as a fighter. You can talk till you're tired, but I've an inkling here"—the man tapped his brain—"of who you are. I stay in camp until I find out one way or another."

"Your visit will be protracted, I imagine."

"Well, I just wanted to give you warning. I don't want you to yelp if you get the worst of it."

"Not me—and don't you bellow either."

"We'll see, we'll see, my sporty young friend." And with a sagacious nod the speaker disappeared.

"That fellow's walking into trouble," Dukane remarked to himself darkly.

The day dragged out. Jimmy ate a tremendous supper in expectation of an arduous night's work—work which was not wholly to be confined to his customary duties in the store. With an enthusiasm which cloaked a growing spirit of excitement, he dispensed merchandise to the workmen who trooped in during the evening. Coats he recommended as garments of iron, while "pants" he guaranteed to wear forever. He displayed a fine abandon of spirit in hurrying from one customer to another, relieving the ever-weary Pennick and exhibiting a solicitude for the latter's ease which won him a place in the proprietor's esteem equal to being the apple of that man's watery eye.

"You're all right, Jimmy," was the encomium which Pennick pronounced at eleven o'clock, when they closed and locked the door and turned out the lights.

"I want to please you," was the modest rejoinder.

"You do, you're the real quill, son," he gave a huge yawn. "Damn it, I must work on the books and I'm sleepy."

"Wouldn't do it if I were you."

“Well, I’ll see.”

He slumped back towards his sleeping room which like his clerk’s had been formed by partitioning off a space in the rear of the store. Jimmy watched him go; the youth could see him pouring out a half-tumbler of whiskey. Then Dukane stole to the case holding revolvers, selected the largest he could find, a long-barreled Colts, and carefully loaded each chamber. Dropping the weapon into his pocket he next lighted a lantern and set it in the store window, veiling its beams in such fashion that they could be seen only from the road in front. Presently there came a soft tap on the pane, the listening clerk pounced upon the lantern, blew out its flame and then restored the utensil to its place on a shelf.

Exultation sent his blood singing; the plot was afoot. Cautiously opening the door he drew a second figure into the darkness of the store; he whispered a few final instructions into his accomplice’s ear, then moved towards Pennick’s room.

The door was still open. Pennick was evidently considering whether or not he should indulge in another drink, for his eye rested thoughtfully on the glass and bottle which re-

posed within reach upon the wash stand. His gaunt figure was inert; his face wore a melancholy expression.

"Thank you, I will," said Jimmy, entering the room.

He poured himself a portion, swallowed it and suddenly grabbed for his handkerchief as the hot tears welled into his eyes.

"Almost pure alcohol," he gasped, after a moment.

"Pretty strong for a fact, but I like whiskey I can taste."

"Well, that's too bad then."

"What's too bad?"

"That you won't have much more of this particular kind."

"Why? There's a whole barrel of it in the store."

"Yes, I know. But you see, Pennick, your health's bad and you can't stay to enjoy the whiskey. You're going away to-night."

"Go on to bed, don't be funny."

"It's the hard, hard truth I'm telling you, my master. Perhaps you haven't known whom you've had here to spot you, but when you're looking at me you behold James A. Dukane junior, son of the old man."

Pennick stared, incredulous, "You'll be trying to sell me a gold brick next," he said.

Jimmy turned about. "Come in, Kendle." His companion and abettor stepped into the room, closing the door after him. "This is the sheriff who has come to take you to the penitentiary, Pennick, for robbing the company. I know all about it; don't say a word, it's too late."

"But I—I—" Pennick dropped upon the edge of the bed where he sat pale and trembling.

Jimmy drew forth his revolver and laid it impressively on his knee as he leaned back in the chair which he had calmly taken possession of.

"Of course, if you want to make a confession, it will go easier with you," his clerk continued. "It's Corbetson we're really after." He paused, while Pennick turned a distracted face from one of them to the other. "You see, I've all your weekly statements and can make out a clear case."

"But you're Hemple," Pennick protested.

"This young man is James A. Dukane's son," Kendle stated sternly, taking a step forward. Then to Jimmy, "Shall I put the hand-

cuffs on him?" He rattled a handful of nails in his pocket.

A tremor ran over the figure of the store-keeper.

"Wait, wait!" he said.

Bowing his face in his hands he sat a long time sunk in a morass of fear, anguish, nervous terror and despair. The dogs of the law were snapping at his heels—or so he thought—and it had been Corbetson who had inveigled him with smooth promises into this criminal business, until now suddenly the penitentiary loomed hideously before him.

"Let me have a drink," he said finally.

But his hand shook so violently that Jimmy had to pour out the liquor. He gulped it off at a draught. Dukane flung in a careless remark that he would soon be where there was only water to drink for the next twenty years.

"Don't be hard on me, men," Pennick said, "I didn't get much—the chief got most of it. He put up the job and pulled me in, then he took the big end. I never really started to drinkin' hard till I got mixed in this; it was the only way I could keep my nerve up. It would kill me to put me in prison—my health's all broke down."

Jimmy adopted a commiserative air.

"Look here, Pennick, I haven't anything against you personally and what I say goes in this matter. You've treated me decently—and maybe I can fix it so you won't have to go to the lockup. Hold on, don't paw me all over." For suddenly the man had staggered towards him, clasping at his hand.

"For God's sake, Jimmy, give me a chance!" he begged.

"All right," the boy made haste to say, mightily embarrassed by the other's emotion. "Go back to the bed and sit down. We'll see what can be done." Then to Kendle, "Take down his statement."

Under a line of questions Pennick eagerly unbosomed himself as to the methods employed in hoodwinking the company in the conduct of the business. He brought books and papers to explain the system of double accounts, pointing out how the plan as developed by the chief had gradually been placed in operation, first by testing it in a small way, which was extended finally to cover the whole business. Kendle rapidly transcribed the man's words into a lucid statement, which damned Corbetson definitely and completely.

"Not bad, not bad," murmured Jimmy appreciatively.

Thereupon with trembling but hopeful fingers, the storekeeper attached his signature, which in turn was witnessed by the pseudo-sheriff.

Kendle scowled at the prisoner. "So I'm not to get him into stripes after all," he said. "An officer's work is always being tipped over by you milk-hearted persons."

"Pennick shall not go to prison, I promise," Dukane answered, with a great show of firmness.

"And these cuffs are the very best, the latest, in fact." Kendle idly dropped his hand into his pocket and once more clinked the spikes.

"Don't! It makes me feel faint," Pennick cried. "I just want to get away where I can start over honest."

"Pack up then; you're going to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, the sheriff will take you to Melton at once, put you on the train and you can vanish."

A fresh paroxysm of fear took possession of him.

"He'll arrest me, he won't let me go!"

"Never fear. All his orders come from me."

I want the combination of the safe before you go, that's all. Write it out so that I'll have it. Do you know anything of this cement steal of the chief's?"

Pennick shook his head. "No, 'cept that he's got one. I never tried to find out. The store was bad enough."

Half an hour later the rear of the building was shrouded in darkness. Two figures, those of the proprietor and his clerk, stepped through the rear door into the star-lit night and moved across the ground towards a dark blotch on the road, which gradually assumed shape as a horse and buggy. A low conversation ensued, whereupon the proprietor climbed in beside the waiting driver, while Dukane stowed the valise he carried under the seat.

Pennick leaned out to shake the youth's hand.

"I hope you catch him, the thief! I'd have been all right but for him. I'll write to you some time, Jimmy, wherever I am."

"Good-bye, Pennick, you've nothing to fear."

The buggy drove softly away and melted into the darkness that covered the earth. Dukane stood for a time motionless. Not a light

was visible, except the millions of stars overhead that dropped their thread-like beams; the steady insistent voice of the river came from the canyon. All the world slept except Jimmy and the river and the two men climbing the rim of Silver Peak Basin.

"Now for the chief," said Jimmy, turning towards the store.

But it was to dream of a girl's fair face that he went.

CHAPTER X

AN UNOFFICIAL INVESTIGATION

DUKANE blew a puff of smoke ceiling-ward and gazed mildly at his chief and superior. His chair was tilted back against the counter, his heels were hooked on a round and his knees were elevated as high as his chin. The morning sunshine poured through the open door, warm and pleasant.

"Pennick complained of pains," he stated. "He was afraid that something was going to happen to him, apparently, so he rushed off last night leaving me in charge."

"That was an extraordinary thing to do, and without consulting me," Corbetson remarked.

"Oh, he explained everything to me—the sales, accounts and books. I'm a fine book-keeper." The other grew more and more visibly uneasy, darting glances first about the store and then at Hemple. The latter con-

tinued very much at ease, "Don't worry, chief. He put me up to the scheme you're working—I'll attend to it all right, never fear." And he bestowed an evil wink upon Corbetson.

"What are you talking about!" the chief said, sharply.

"Ah, you might as well come down from that kind of talk. How was the graft to go on"—at that word the other stiffened—"if I didn't know the particulars? I assure you that I can play rings around Pennick when it comes to smooth work of that sort. Of course I must have my slice."

Hating the youth as he did, Corbetson experienced a venomous desire to choke the life out of him at this speech, but he saw himself helpless, saw himself saddled through the strange disappearance of the storekeeper with another and undesirable accomplice. Already the youth was familiarly presuming upon the fact; he would grow bolder as time passed. A thrill of anxiety shot through the man's breast at the new danger which this complication presented; the boy was reckless, audacious; unscrupulous; the first time he was crossed he might shout his knowledge to the whole world. Dangerous indeed; a child playing with powder! And what

was worse, Hemple would soon recognize his power to flout Corbetson.

"It's just as well he's gone," he said, attempting to speak with indifference. "Pennick was half-crazy with liquor. Any story he told you about—"

"Nay, nay, old man, he showed me the books. We might as well understand one another. I get my whack at the pie or I'll yell my head off, and that wouldn't be healthy for Mr. Corbetson. Don't act sulky; I'm in the deal, so you might as well smile and be pleasant. It looks like easy money and I'll take my chance with you of going to jail."

"Keep your voice down," the chief exclaimed, fiercely.

"Well, we'll whisper then. How much do I get out of it? I must know that at once."

Murder stood in Corbetson's eyes, while he measured the future and hesitated at a decision. Clearly he was in a quandary; the youth knew now all about the transaction, while on the other hand, he as chief must have someone to conduct the business, and though he hated Hemple with his whole soul and loathed the prospect of partnership with him he saw nothing else for it but this new alliance. Fate had

in truth played him a scurvy trick; when he thought to eliminate the boy from the field wherein Enid Crofton was the prize, he had in reality advanced him to a position of unholy power. What in the name of heaven had Pennick meant by vanishing? Surely, the man was mad. Thus torn by doubts, fears, passions, and alarms, the chief engineer at last said in an indistinct voice that Hemple could have a quarter share. The minute the words were uttered he would have bitten off his tongue to have them back.

"Good, the store will run along like a new clock," Jimmy stated calmly. "But I'll need a helper."

"Get some stupid individual who won't find out too much," Corbetson snapped bitterly.

"I'll hire Hop Spencer. He couldn't tell graft if he met it walking down the street. You and I ought to feather our nests pretty comfortably, old chap, before we're done here."

The unconcealed enthusiasm, the appalling frankness with which Hemple voiced his sentiments made Corbetson's blood run cold, for even to himself he had not, as never is the fashion of new criminals, permitted the crime to appear in his mind in all its natural naked-

ness. Too hideously it shocked the ears when spoken in this off-hand manner and conjured up unpleasant associated pictures of punishment. Would that Hemple were at the bottom of the sea with a mill-stone about his neck! And from that moment might have been dated the blacker thoughts which engaged the chief's mind.

Accordingly Hop Spencer was installed that noon in the position of clerk so lately vacated by his adored Jimmy and when he had brought his bundle of possessions to his new habitation he drank as from a cup of adoration the business directions which Hemple outlined for his guidance.

"You can read figures?" the proprietor inquired, with uplifted finger. Spencer nodded. "Very well, all you have to do is to follow the prices on the tags, gather in the coin and smoke all the cigars you want. Leave the liquor alone, for you walk with difficulty as it is, Hop, and it would bring me to tears to see you trying to carry a full cargo."

Spencer went off into a spasm of laughter. He never drank a drop, as Hemple well knew, and therefore this admonition was to him the superlative degree of comicality.

"I'll get drunk as a fiddler," he shouted.

"And if Lantry or any of his bunch annoy you, shoot their heads off," Jimmy concluded.

The next week passed with only one incident to mar the placidity of the storekeepers' lives. For they were indeed busy, since Jimmy now had the burden of bookkeeping to carry, a strange complication of names and figures which confused him mightily and wrung many a groan from his lips; while Spencer though he could read figures deciphered Pen-nick's scrawl only after profound study and these hieroglyphics engaged him hours at a time, as he resolved to work his fingers off for Hemple. Sometimes in his labors Dukane would pause with uplifted pen to wonder if he should ever see Enid Crofton again; for first it was three days that elapsed since that momentous morning when she kissed him, then four, then five, without his having even so much as a glimpse of her face. Bound as he was, like a slave, to his self-imposed martyrdom it seemed as if centuries had dragged their weary length by during those five days. Then came the night of the fifth day.

Dukane and Spencer had retired to bed, the lame clerk in the room formerly occupied by

Pennick. Both were weary. It seemed to Jimmy that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he was aroused by a noise at his window, a low creaking noise. He sat up, looked wildly about and put one foot out upon the floor. The hasp snapped, a period of waiting silence ensued, then the window slid slowly upward. Jimmy's heart galloped tumultuously in his chest and he wished that he had one of the store's long cannon-like Colts revolvers in his hand. A vow rose soundlessly from his lips that hereafter he would carry half a dozen to bed with him. Was this a burglar? Was this Lantry bent on revenge? He sat rigid. An instant later he bent stealthily and grasped one of his shoes by the toe. In the pale light framed by the casement of the window a figure appeared climbing in, slowly, cautiously, noiselessly. At last the intruder gained the room. Gathering up an armful of bed clothes Jimmy swooped wildly upon him, at the same time uttering a horrible yell; and together, in one rolling, tumbling, twisting mass of bodies and blankets the pair landed upon the floor. Dukane had caught the night prowler unawares; the blankets swathed the man's head and muffled his cries; Dukane, half-naked, hammered

him vigorously with the humble weapon of leather which he carried. At last Spencer awakened by the uproar, by the thumping of bodies on the floor and against the partition, hobbled upon the scene carrying a lamp.

"Help me tie him, it's a burglar," Jimmy gasped—"it" expressing the exact appearance of the shapeless bundle which he continued to whack, in spite of choked, protesting cries.

Dukane ceased. Gradually appeared a towsled head, then a perspiring face, then a pair of shoulders.

"Do you want to kill me?" the man demanded, indignantly.

"Aha, it's the reporter!" Jimmy exclaimed. "So you've turned burglar."

"Nothing of the kind, I just came here on business."

"A queer kind of business."

"I want a look at your arm and I intend to have it. Because you act stubbornly about it, I have to resort to any means I'm able. Do you think my paper's keeping me here to do nothing? If you had any common sense you'd let me see that arm and have it over with, instead of causing me to go around nights sneaking in windows when I want to be sleeping."

Jimmy in one of the store's night-shirts, which had a brilliant embroidery in red down the bosom, surveyed him ironically.

"Of course, the world is run for the sole benefit of your paper," he suggested.

"Well, if you knew the old man, you'd think so. I've got to turn up with some sort of story about this Dukane affair I'm on or I lose my job."

"Hop, show him one of your arms, if he must see an arm."

Spencer obediently displayed not one but both of those members to the sulky gaze of the prisoner; they were brown, hard, well-muscled arms, without a mark on them.

"I'll catch you yet," the correspondent said, significantly to Hemple. "I've a nose for news and you're the bird of paradise I'm after. I feel it in my bones. If I only dared I'd wire in to-morrow who I think you are."

"Why don't you take a sporting chance and do it," Jimmy urged. "I'd enjoy posing for awhile as the lost son and heir. Maybe it would fetch some coin my way."

The reporter grunted an unpleasant reply, then asked, "Well, are you going to keep me here all night? I want to have some sleep."

"Climb out the way you came. We can't open doors for amateur burglars. And don't try the same route twice, for you are likely to receive a piece of lead on your next visit."

Dukane's reflections as he again returned to his couch were not especially cheerful; the chuckle with which he had climbed under the covers gave way to anxious thought. The newspaper man was uncomfortably near the truth and uncomfortably determined to make it the truth. Jimmy had before him a hot race. Whether he could make certain of Corbetson's principal iniquity and obtain the proofs thereof before the reporter established the identity he sought was the question. Once the tale was put on the wires that he was Jimmy Dukane and was here in Silver Peak Basin, the basket would be kicked over and all his plans spilt. For a time maledictions flowed from his lips upon the head of the offending busybody; it was only when he remembered the whacking which he had given the fellow with his shoe that the chuckles once more resumed their place in his throat.

Thus, though he did not see his way out, though indeed matters seemed hopelessly entangled for the time, he realized that affairs

were pressing to an issue. Beyond doubt his hands were full, what with the store, what with Corbetson, Lantry, Enid Crofton and this reporter. For once in his life he was primed with business to the chin, and if he had had difficulty in hitherto employing his time before coming to this quarter of the world, such was not now the case. He would, were the truth known, have liked a period of rest, or if not rest, at least of single occupation with a certain girl.

Saturday dawned cloudy, with a threatening rain hanging low in the heavens. Silver Peak was invisible, while along the ridge which formed the rim of the basin billows of fog rolled over the fringe of scattered pines; in the canyon, now a gloomy cleft in the rock, the river roared with a sullen angry voice.

Dukane standing before the store door looked off at the low wooden frame which held the form of the dam, at the black dots which were workmen moving on and over the scaffolding and measured with narrowed eyes the progress being made. To the degree the dam rose before he could make his final move against the chief, whatever that should be, to that degree would the rubbish which consti-

tuted its core have to be torn out and replaced with genuine concrete. This would not be easy; the thin layers of cement which covered the rubbish from time to time would no doubt prove intractable enough to make the necessary reconstruction difficult. With the future rather than with the present, his thoughts were therefore engaged, wrathful thoughts that Corbetson should thus dare to violate the trust imposed in him, while laying a train of events which would result in withered farms and ruined settlers. The breaking of the dam, once the desert was made to blossom, would be nothing short of a gigantic disaster. And as he meditated, the gravity of the part he played, the valuable purpose he was destined to serve in preventing a crime against a number of fellow men, for the first time really assumed full proportions in his mind. What in the beginning had merely been an intense personal desire to balk Corbetson now appeared as something more serious, more comprehensive, greater and more worthy. To the humble workmen who toiled for two dollars a day by the sweat of their brow, laboring unwittingly in a dishonest work, a duty was owing by him; to the younger engineers who

knew the wrong being committed and who yet must out of loyalty to their employer keep silent; to his father's company which was being grossly betrayed; to the owners who were building the project in good faith! For he had the power to right the wrong. As the ramifications of the injury Corbetson's evil course would work displayed themselves, he almost shrank back appalled. He wiped his forehead and gazed about; he must stop this sinister business, stop it soon.

A sense of heavy responsibility depressed him. This was a man's task he had undertaken; and Corbetson, once he was aware he was threatened by discovery, would turn it into a man's war. Half-wonderingly, Dukane asked himself if he were equal to the work; if he were indeed a man and after all not merely a boy. Then the image of his father rose before him, that stern, fearless ruler who could be generous to his enemies but who asked no quarter. A warm flush of pride suffused Jimmy at recollection of his parent and he knew on the instant that in similar circumstances to those in which he himself stood Dukane senior would never have flinched. He too would show that another Dukane could be

a man, could grapple with grave obstacles and be their master. Throwing back his shoulders, he set his jaw. The son would be worthy the father.

"I believe I'm entering a new era, as the books say," he exclaimed aloud. "The gay and scintillating past is a thing to be wiped out in manful deeds. Dad will shed tears of joy on my shoulder." Nevertheless though his speech was light, his resolve was firm.

About noon he caught sight of Enid Crofton riding a long way off; he ran out and waved his hand frantically at her, but she did not appear to see him, she rode on her way without making response, until finally he was compelled to give over in chagrin. Under ordinary circumstances this would have left him ripe for the quarrel which Lantry attempted to force upon him sometime later, but he was learning to think twice on a matter before giving rein to his tongue. The fellow, accompanied by another man, stamped insolently into the store and demanded a shirt. Jimmy laid out several for his inspection, all the while speaking circumspectly.

"Wrap it up quick or I'll tear off your scalp," the man growled. And when he re-

ceived the parcel, "Come outside and I'll pay you what I owe."

"You can pay for the shirt or charge it," Dukane said.

"Who's talkin' about shirts! You thought you and your bunch could beat me up with impunity; I'm goin' to get you for that business, if I work in this camp for a year to do it."

"Very well."

"Keep it in mind, you've got it comin' to you. They'll take you to the hospital for a month when I'm done."

The promised rain came that evening in the form of a foggy drizzle, continuing throughout Sunday and Monday. With the passage of time Dukane grew more and more impatient to learn whether his suspicions were correct as to Corbetson's manipulating two sets of maps in the construction of the dam. This fact he must definitely verify. Watch as he would he never beheld open the oaken chest which held what must have been the two series of blueprints, though the false ones were always at hand for the assistants' reference; for the chief carefully locked the box each time he raised its lid. As has been stated the store occupied

one-half of the double frame building, while the chief's offices filled the other and a door, usually open during the day, led from one room to the other. Through this the youth maintained his surveillance as he moved about the store, hoping that the opportunity for which he prayed would finally come.

Patience is generally rewarded in this world; about eleven o'clock he paused in an aisle between two counters, transfixed by a glimpse of the chest which he caught through the open door. It sat against the opposite side of the long office, its lid was lifted, resting against the wall. He stole forward and gazed into the room. Corbetson stood over a long table upon which were outspread two blue-prints side by side, the corners of each fastened with thumb tacks, and was evidently engaged in a studied comparison, as his look moved back and forth from one to the other. From time to time he noted figures on a memorandum pad. At last he loosened the tacks in one with his knife-point, rolled up the sheet and stood considering, when as voices sounded outside he glided silently to the chest, dropped the roll within and lowered the lid. Leschelles and Satterfield entered. With an ardent eye Du-

kane observed that the chief turned to meet them without locking the box.

A technical discussion ensued among the three engineers. Dukane gradually withdrew until he was sheltered by a pile of boots and shoes heaped high on an open tray, from which point of vantage he could still command the interior of the office. The three men continued to talk, occasionally consulting the map which had been left upon the table. If the chief would but leave the room for a fraction of a second!—and as the wish flashed through the watcher's mind the three men moved towards the door. They went out; Jimmy held his breath, until the blood beat like little hammers in his ears. Inch by inch he edged around the pile of boots, moved towards the door; he put an eye to the line of its lintel and gazed at the office front, through the windows of which he could see the men standing outside. Their backs were towards him; they pointed at the dam, still discussing the point in question.

Should he risk the opportunity or should he not? He measured the space he had to cross, then glanced at the back of the chief engineer visible through the glass. The men walked forward a dozen paces, again halted. If the

trick was ever to be turned, now was the time; but should Corbetson chance idly to turn he could not miss the sight of Dukane's figure, since the open door gave range of the whole front office. With sudden decision Jimmy went forward on tip-toe, swiftly, silently, and now that the die was cast never transferred his look from the chest. He breathed in short, repressed breaths; his heart beat thunderously in his bosom, while all the sensations of a burglar forcing a dangerous enterprise were his.

Half a minute later he had the lid once more leaning against the wall and he was reaching for the topmost roll. Unfortunately there were many rolls. Which was the one the chief had last examined he had no way of knowing. He bit his lip with vexation, temporary anger; he twitched in a fever of excitement. Well, thought he, one might as well be taken for a goat as a sheep; and there was the consolation that the goat generally learned what it wanted to know while the sheep did not. Turning he slipped to the table and hurriedly scanned the map outspread upon its surface; with the outline which it stamped upon his brain fresh in mind he fell upon the rolls in the chest, opening each in turn until at the fifth

he found the one he desired—the duplicate and yet not the duplicate of the one on the table.

Success engenders boldness. With a sense of newly acquired power he walked to the table and spread the map beside its mate, thereby tempting fate almost beyond endurance. But it seems that audacity at times carries its own protection; the chief continued to speak with his assistants, never once facing about. The maps were of only a section of the dam, but to one who like Dukane had kept his ears and eyes open and absorbed all manner of scraps of information, they were readily intelligible. The number on each—7—showed that they were the same. In outline only, however, were they similar; the one which the young investigator held open indicated a solid construction of reinforced concrete, while the other, the working map, was wholly different in character; it outlined a box-like structure, or rather a series of box-like cells filled with loose stone; this, he perceived, corresponded exactly to the actual form in which the dam was being built. It was a fascinating study, one that confirmed beyond doubt the suggestion made to him by Kendle and which he had adopted for his own. With these two sheets open side by side the

fraudulent nature of the work was clear as water.

A long, slow, immense sigh of satisfaction issued from Dukane's lips. Next instant he started up; a boot-heel had sounded on the doorsill and he saw Corbetson advancing towards him. The released map flew into a roll in his hands, his thoughts raced at lightning speed during the interval before the chief reached him, in an effort to frame some plausible explanation of his act. Out of the circumstances however, his usually agile mind found little material on which to build.

"What are you doing in here?" Corbetson demanded.

In order to gain time Dukane sat down upon the end of the table, swung a foot, ran his hand through his hair, gazed about the room and stroked the roll of paper he held.

"Nothing in particular," he replied mildly.

Corbetson seized the roll which he fingered, jerked it open; his eyes played for an instant to and fro between it and the one on the table. Then he whirled quickly to look at the chest. Out of his face the blood faded slowly, only to return with a rush.

"You thief! What are you doing in that

box? What do you know about these maps!" he exclaimed, with vehemence of passion which Dukane would scarcely have credited to the man. "You spy! Coming in here when my back is turned to meddle in what doesn't concern you!"

He took a step towards the youth, lifting a clenched fist. His eye burned with half-mad fury, his mustache showed on his lip in a stiff, bristling line.

"Don't strike me!" Dukane cried, slipping to his feet.

Nevertheless for the first time a real thrill of fear ran through his body. For the eyes he looked into were the eyes of a man temporarily capable of murder.

"Breathe a word of what you've seen and—" Corbetson did not finish his threat with speech, but his menace was plain.

"I've only one thing to say to you," Dukane answered, setting his jaw. "I've a bullet for the man who lays a finger on me."

And with another flashing interchange of hostile looks each turned away.

CHAPTER XI

THE COUNTER STROKE

WHEREAS Corbetson had hitherto experienced that uneasy dread of discovery which every criminal knows, he now suffered the torments which come to the guilty man when he learns that his crime is the knowledge of another and has become a sharp sword over his head. By nature, by training, the chief engineer shrank from anything that partook of the character of personal physical violence; he was cunning instead of daring. That it should be Hemple of all men, the youth who seemed by force of destiny to have been flung as an obstacle across his path at every turn, made the morsel all the more bitter; he could not of course know that both Dukane's purpose and acts were the result of deliberate intention. From the colloquy which had ensued after Pennick's evanishment he believed that the young man was as unscrupulous as himself, that he possessed far more brains

than the average run of workmen and that having caught the chief engineer at a disadvantage, would suck money out of him as a leech sucks blood. Well, he would allow the boy to hold the impression that he was successful and meanwhile he would arrange to be rid of him for good. Now there was Lantry who also hated him. Corbetson sank back into his revolving chair, his brows gradually drawing closer and closer together.

As for the subject of his diabolical meditations, Dukane took to standing often in the rear of the store, whence he could look both towards the Crofton home and towards the road that led from Melton. For a girl who had voluntarily kissed him Enid was now singularly perverse in not showing herself; while Kendle was irritatingly slow in putting in an appearance to report the success or failure of his secret inquiry. Until the fact was thoroughly established that the Roseland Cement Company, whatever kind of company it was, was working with Corbetson in the fraud, the chain of evidence would not be complete. Dukane gradually worked himself into such a state of fretful impatience that Hop Spencer believed him attacked by some mysterious ailment and

the cripple began to spend time reading the labels on the bottles of the store's patent medicine stock.

But on Wednesday this changed. A note was left for Jimmy at the door which for the time being banished his clouds and made the day brilliant. It read:

"I will be riding on the ridge this evening.—Enid."

All his heart bounded up at this veiled expression of desire on her part to see him, to meet him again and alone. In an ecstasy he read the line over and over, repeating the words half aloud, smiling on the dainty sheet of note-paper and at last concluded by placing it in his breast. Was she beginning to love him? Had he drawn her heart to him? A thousand anxious, happy, unanswered questions ran through his mind, a thousand fancied interchanges of words and looks and speeches, while for half an hour he sat on a cracker-box behind the store whither he betook himself and gazed in mute adoration at the distant ranch house which guarded his beloved Enid.

About six o'clock he bethought himself that he should have dispatched a reply; would she not expect a reply?

"Hop!" he shouted, then remembered that Spencer had limped away to eat his supper.

So until his clerk's return he contained his new impatience only by holding her note before him, dreamily staring at it. Finally he took pen and scratched across the bottom of the sheet:

"I would go to the ends of the earth to gain a single look from you.—Jimmy."

His heart exulted as he conned this splendid avowal, this grandiloquent sentiment. Sitting there with his body among piles of overalls, of boots, of food, he nevertheless had his head among the stars and drank the divine glory which is only known by poets, martyrs, and lovers. When at last Hop Spencer returned he handed him the note, now folded in a fresh envelope.

"Take this to Miss Crofton at once, Hop, and don't soil it with your fingers," he commanded. "Carry it, my lame Mercury, as if you were carrying a book with leaves of gold bound by jewels to a princess in a far country. Place it in her own hands, bow low and retire without speech. This is the most important mission you will ever perform in your life, therefore go with due haste."

Spencer was unquestionably impressed by the eloquent style of the command. As befitted an affair of great importance his face settled into lines of gravity. He received the letter and turned it over thrice, regarding it reverently.

"But how about your supper?" he mustered courage to ask. For his master to miss a meal would be a serious matter.

Jimmy waved this aside with a lofty air.

"Stop in and tell the cook to keep something warm," he said, "then deliver this and hurry back, for you'll have to run the store awhile by yourself."

It was a brilliant evening. The storm of the early part of the week had brought the first hint of autumn, leaving on its departure a slight frost that had quenched here and there upon a bush or tree the flow of green and edged it with gold and crimson. The day was beginning to die as Dukane set leisurely forth towards the ridge, following a footpath that skirted the basin rim instead of pursuing the usual road. He had dismissed the immediate burden of his secret war against Corbetson; for the time being he resolved to put aside care, to drink in the beauty of the passing day,

to enjoy the meeting with Enid Crofton and sip the cup of happiness of which of late he had tasted so little.

His release from the confinement of the store was like a new breath of life. He filled his lungs with the crystal air; as he advanced he gazed about him at the trees, the stones, the rugged lofty mass of Silver Peak which wore a fresh mantle of snow and presented a different aspect to the world. Among the bushes on the rocky hillside a few invisible birds were chirping, while over the whole basin descended the peace of evening.

What a wondrous change had been wrought in his life! He reviewed each subsequent event from the moment he stepped off the pullman car until the present and marked how each had contributed its share towards the transformation. It was as if Silver Peak Basin had been cast by nature for this very purpose, as if prepared as a background against which to stage the small but eventful drama of his life. Everything had led to it—mountain, dam and river. The dénouement was yet to be enacted; what the end would be was yet to be unfolded.

Presently he came to the road and ascended

the hill. When he paused about half-way up and looked toward the Crofton ranch, he beheld a figure on horseback emerging from the trees that framed the house—she was coming! He quickened his pace, he would be on top of the ridge to greet her; and glancing over his shoulder as he climbed he observed that she was riding in his direction at a brisk canter. By the time he completed the ascent she had reached the foot of the ridge and was hidden by the scrub of pines that grew scattering over the earth. Seating himself upon a boulder he pushed back his hat and surveyed the prospect which the plain opened up before him. In the evening light it seemed to swim in a lake of purple, shot here and there with streaks of gold or wine-color. The ineffable peace of approaching night filled it and the immense space, the wide plain, seemed impregnated with a sentient brooding soul.

Suddenly the youth was aroused from his reverie by a noise in his rear. He turned his head, then leaped to his feet, startled, alarmed, on guard. For Lantry stood a few paces off, while on every side men were appearing, from trees, from bushes, from stones, as if all at once sprang up out of crevices in the earth.

"So here you are, waitin' to see your girl," Lantry jeered.

Instantly the knowledge that he had been tricked by a forged note flashed into Jimmy's brain; he looked at one and another of Lantry's companions, eight of them, and perceived that he was ringed about, that he had walked into the trap prepared for him, that the camp ruffian at last had him in his power. But how! The plan of a forged note on dainty stationery was too subtle for such a man. Could this be Corbetson's counter-stroke? Had he taken advantage of the enmity burning in Lantry's breast against Hemple to employ the man for his own scoundrelly purpose? And now to complicate matters here rode also Enid Crofton into the men's hands.

"Yes, I'm here. What do you want?" he asked.

"Why, the honor of your company," the leader mocked.

A little distance behind Dukane a rock shaped like an old-fashioned straw bee-hive thrust itself out of the ground to the height of some eight feet. Casting a quick glance about him the boy observed it, saw that if he gained its cover the men could approach him only in

front. Jumping back two or three steps he next instant stood with his back against its surface; though it was but a grain of comfort this new position afforded him since he was outnumbered nine to one.

He dropped his hands into his coat-pockets and bent his black brows once more on Lantry.

"You're here by the chief's orders I see," he remarked.

The success of the stratagem had put the leader in the good humor which generally precedes brutality in brutal men. To his notion the situation was one from which he could extract considerable amusement.

"Good guess. The chief is cleanin' the tough characters out of camp and is beginnin' with Jimmy Hemple."

"What do you intend to do with me?"

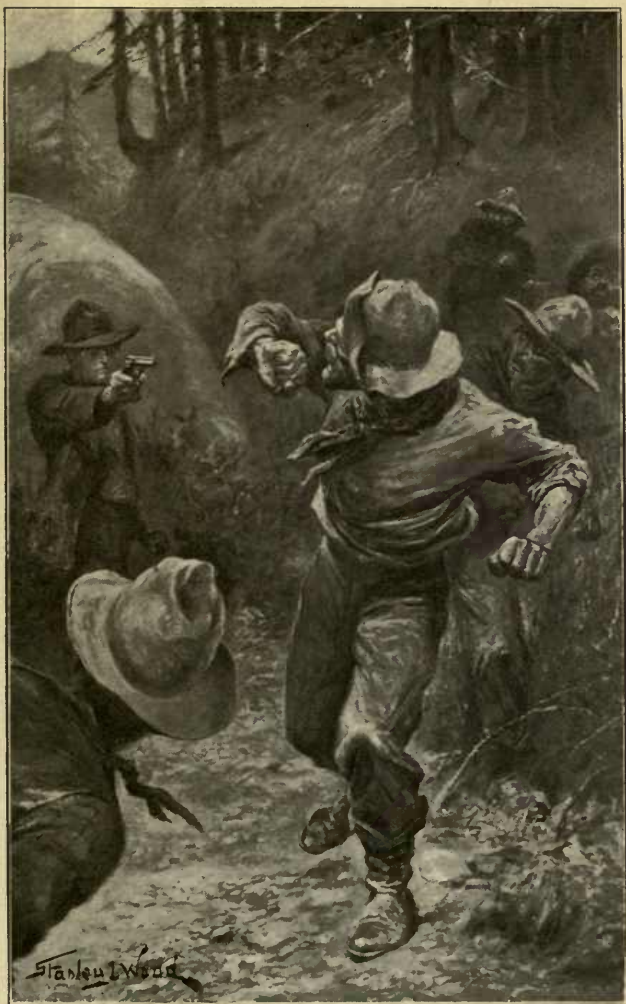
"Never you mind—but it'll be a plenty. Come along now." He took a step and put out a hand towards Dukane, while his followers narrowed the circle which hemmed their prisoner in.

Dukane brought forth his right hand; it held a large, business-like automatic revolver. At sight of this ugly weapon which could pour a stream of lead into their midst by the mere

pressure of a finger, Lantry drew back hastily with his men following his example. Jimmy said nothing. He ran his tongue over his lips once, pulled his slouch hat down over his brow a trifle lower and waited.

"Here put that up; we don't want any shootin'," Lantry said. "Don't make a fool of yourself."

In the face of such an overwhelming number as surrounded him the leader had anticipated that Hemple would yield with nothing more than vocal protest. This was another kind of affair; the sting which the boy carried was likely to make it a bloody affair if they attacked him. Some of the men drew back; the death either of themselves or of Hemple was not part of the bargain, and they were well aware that even if the prisoner with his back against the rock was killed, three or four of their own number would in the end be sacrificed before a victory was obtained. Much as Lantry would personally have liked to see the boy dead, much as he hated him, he was too shrewd to seek his death under such circumstances. Once it became known, and known it was bound to be with so many participants, that nine men had slain one youth nothing would stop the



“ Here, put that up ; we don’t want any shootin’ ,”
Lantry said

vengeance that in truth would strike them. Therefore this was not the occasion, or at least not the way.

"Well, are you goin' to put that gun up?" he demanded.

"No."

The entire affair, surprise, defense and talk, had occurred rapidly. While half the men kept a watchful eye upon Hemple, Lantry consulted in a low voice with the others. The upshot of this conference was that the men widened their circle a space, thus enclosing the whole rock. By this maneuver Dukane could not see the complete number, or follow the movements of two who had moved back out of sight. Meanwhile he debated what course to pursue, whether to remain where he was until they either forced the fight or gave it up, or to spring forward and by threat of his pistol break through their ranks.

Again Lantry and the men in sight gathered closer, so close indeed that they faced him but three paces off. He leaned a little towards them, gripping his revolver, shifting his eyes from those in front to those who edged against the sides of the rock, resolving never to be taken alive.

"We don't intend to hurt you," Lantry stated, "we only want to see that you go to Melton and keep out of camp."

"Yes, I know you're the kind of man to trust," Dukane replied, scornfully, "but when I go away from here it will be when I'm ready, not before."

Lantry's hatred flashed up.

"If you put up a fight, we'll drop you over a cliff."

"Well, you're going to get the fight if you move any nearer."

"Then I suppose we'll have to give it up."

The big fellow cast a resigned look at the ground, at the men about him, at the rock against which the cornered prisoner stood.

There sounded a scraping noise over Dukane's head, then a loud shout and though he strove to swerve on one side a man's heavy weight fell upon his shoulders and crushed him. At the same time he saw Lantry and the others leaping towards him and as he went down he savagely pulled the trigger of the automatic. *Bang—bang—bang—bang*, sounded joyously in his ears as he vanished, buried under the swarm of his assailants.

Squirming, clawing, kicking, almost unable

to breathe, utterly unable to see, he fought like a wild-cat. Once he sank his teeth into a man's arm and heard a smothered yell of pain that answered the tactics; once he got his fingers in a handful of hair and caused another voice to cry in anguish. The very fact that he was at the bottom of the pile was a temporary advantage; he could not be distinguished from his enemies who pulled and hauled and pommelled each other in an endeavor to reach him.

Suddenly the heap burst apart, while the men shouted with fresh alarm. The crushing weight was lifted, and alert for this very thing he sprang to his feet disheveled, dirty, torn, one cheek bleeding. Then the cause of the disruption was apparent. Enid Crofton coming upon the summit had perceived the *mêlée* and guessing who was its storm-center had charged full speed into the mass with her pony. Right and left she struck viciously with her quirt, while the horse cut more than one body with his sharp hoofs as he snorted and pawed in fear.

The rout was complete. Dukane still clutched his revolver, glaring fiercely about. One man, he saw, limping painfully towards the shelter of some trees, another crawled groan-

ing to one side, with his hip soaked black with blood where a bullet had found its mark; and others moved angrily about rubbing portions of their bodies where whip or hoof had hit.

Lantry was beside himself with rage.

"Come back, you curs! Are you going to give up now when he's shot your mates?" he shouted, in an effort to collect his followers for another sortie.

Dukane slipped fresh shells into his weapon.

"Try it on, we're waiting for you," Dukane taunted belligerently.

But the leader's commands met with small response. Two or three men joined him, but more than this number he could not win, and when Jimmy sent a bullet kicking up dirt at their feet, even the braver portion hurried to withdraw. The boy looked up at Enid sitting her mount with compressed lips and shining eyes, undaunted, unafraid.

"Come, now is the time to get safely away," she exclaimed.

"They won't try it again. What a courageous girl you are! I would go through it all again to have you here by my side."

A rich flood of color brightened her face, a smile hovered on her lips.

"See, it's evening," she pointed down upon the plain where the shadows had thickened, then directed her gauntleted hand towards a horseman who was ascending the road from Tunneltown. "Someone is coming. Follow me, I don't want to be seen in this melodramatic position. Along the ridge a little way is a path that will take us down into the basin without our running into any of those men again."

She touched heel to the pony and it started off at walk along the crest of ridge which lay westward. Soon they were out of sight and hearing of the scene so lately enacted, the spot blotted out by the pines and brush.

"You were not hurt?" she inquired, all at once anxious.

"No, I enjoyed it."

"But there's a cut on your cheek. It's still bleeding."

"That's nothing. A heel of one of the men planted itself there; for awhile I thought it would never be off."

"Come nearer," she ordered, drawing rein. She bent over and inspected the cheek. "It's swelling. What's more, I believe that left eye is turning black-and-blue."

"What, again!" Jimmy cried, in disgust. "Why, it's only a little while since I got over it's being black before. I wish you'd walk instead of riding; I don't like long-distance conversation."

Laughing her consent she dismounted, leading the pony behind her.

"How did this all happen? I thought they were surely killing you. For a moment I worked to kill them all; it was so unfair, so many against one."

"I kept them pretty busy nevertheless," Jimmy answered jauntily. "One or two of them are carrying lead."

"Don't speak in that dreadful fashion. Will they die?"

"Oh, no. The bullets hit them low, because I didn't have time to aim when I went down. I just pulled the trigger on the chance that some of them would be in range, but most of the bullets went into the ground."

"Two are enough," said she. "The man had climbed over the rock and was dropping on you when I came in sight. Tell me who wrote that note; I didn't."

Jimmy halted, so did she. He faced her for a moment in silence deliberating whether

or not to tell her his full suspicions. To accuse any man of perpetrating such a plot was indeed to make a grave charge.

"Tell me," she cried, impatient.

"I think it was—the man we agreed not to discuss."

"Mr. Corbetson!"

"Yes."

"But that—" She broke off and biting her lip under the stress of excitement which this suggested infamy awakened gazed at him with round eyes. That a man who held the position of importance and trust which the chief engineer did could descend to such a depth of villainy, that the man whom she had entertained under the same roof and at the same table with this boy could conceive of such treachery, seemed to bring her to the brink of an abyss.

"That would be horrible," she whispered.

"Mr. Corbetson and I are engaged in a little private war. Still I never supposed he would dare to try such a desperate move. He's after me, that's certain."

"But he placed you in the store, he lets you remain by his side. It is incredible."

Jimmy looked about until he found a stone,

then seated himself, for the fatigue of his one-sided struggle was beginning to make itself known in his legs.

"Mr. Corbetson wouldn't shed a single tear if I disappeared from Silver Peak Basin," he stated, "or if my crushed body were found at the bottom of some cliff. Unfortunately for his schemes, I know too much of what he's attempting; I hold his reputation, his future, in my hand." Jimmy held out one soiled hand by way of illustration. "The man is desperate, that's all. I don't know by proof, except that Lantry admitted, that he was at the bottom of this trick, but I know in my heart that he was the originator of it, with these men for his tools. Lantry believing that he had captured me said Corbetson had employed them to run me out of the country, but Lantry would never have let it stop with that, for he hated me too much. And, mark my words, that was exactly why Corbetson hired him!"

Conviction slowly showed itself upon her countenance. She turned and gazed off through the boughs at the low buildings of the camp, barely visible now in the purple mist that filled the valley. An involuntary shudder

shook her frame, for a spirit of tragedy all at once had invaded her peaceful home.

She faced about swiftly. "I'm sorry that I ever quarrelled with you about him," she said. "I supposed him honorable and worthy. How can such men exist, deceiving the world and plotting trouble!"

"He won't deceive it much longer, believe me," Dukane answered with emphasis.

"But he won't stop now, he will resort to even more desperate measures to harm you. You must go away, you must go at once. These men will do everything in their power to—who knows?—perhaps kill you."

"I stay right on the job," Jimmy spoke this time with vehemence rather than emphasis.

She came nearer, "Won't you go for me?"

"One of the reasons I'm staying is because I love you." He rose to his feet. "That scoundrel loves you too and I don't intend that he shall insult you by telling you of his love."

Her bosom began to rise and fall with the stress of emotion which mastered her; her eyes fastened themselves on his. A sudden realization of what it would have meant to her had anything happened to him in the struggle at

the rock, what it would mean if she should lose him in the future, stirred her inmost nature. Ever since she had followed the impulse when she kissed him in the store he had filled her mind with an invisible presence.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, it would break my heart if harm came to you," she cried.

"I will not leave you now or ever," he answered, with voice grown inexplicably husky.

Somehow their hands met; the next instant she was in his arms and his lips warm on hers. All the world seemed to stand still for them in a glorious pause, all they knew was that their hearts were united and that a deep and profound happiness enwrapped them.

Over the earth a faint breath of air stirred, shaking the needles of the pines and the leaves of the aspens, passing with a whispering voice that seemed the hushed utterance of the millions of lovers who had gone before. In the west the majestic peak of the lofty mountain gazed down upon them in vast calm and content. It was as if the universe had been designed for this one moment—wood, water, earth and stars—and expressed its perfection at the instant their lips met and their souls united. Somewhere off on the hillside a bird

poured forth a golden flow of melody which ended in a single note of exquisite sweetness.

At last they went on hand in hand, the pony stepping slow after his mistress, and presently they turned aside to follow a path which wound and twisted down the hillside.

"I don't know who you are, Jimmy. I have suspected for a long time that Hemple isn't your name," Enid said, a little wistfully, "but you will tell me in your own good time. All I care about is that we love each other, that I trust you."

"Sweetheart, I'll tell you my real name now."

"Not if you don't wish to for the present. 'Jimmy' is enough to satisfy me—I will even love you just the same if your true name is Hemplendink, as you once told me."

Jimmy laughed aloud in sheer joyousness. Her love could surmount even such a cognomen.

"There's no reason in the world," said he "why you shouldn't know it—only I will ask you to tell no one until I settle a certain matter."

"Of course, I'll do whatever you wish." And she pressed his fingers tenderly.

"My name is Dukane—James A. Dukane, Jr."

If he had expected an expression of surprise to escape her lips at this announcement he was destined to suffer disappointment. She continued to descend the path for a time in silence. At last she said:

"That is much finer than Jimmy Herple-dink," she gave a low delicious ripple of laughter. "Oh, it would cost my pride something to have had to bear such a name. But Dukane—yes, that is ever so much better."

From the hillside the path led forward until it joined the road some space ahead. Here they paused to look back at the ridge and speculate upon what had become of the men, those wounded and those unhurt. But they could see nothing; darkness was settling rapidly, overhead stars sprinkled the sky and only in the west the light still remained.

"Take care of yourself, Jimmy, take care of yourself, for now you're mine," she said, holding fast to him when they prepared to separate before the ranch house. "For you are mine now, Jimmy A. Dukane, junior. It seems as if I almost knew that name, as if I had heard

it before. But take care of yourself and come back to me."

Next instant her arms were about his neck, her parting kiss on his lips. Then she was gone.

CHAPTER XII

A COUNCIL OF WAR

THE doctor, the two assistant engineers and the newspaper correspondent sat about nine o'clock in the physician's office playing bridge. In the three former the reporter had found congenial company and had in turn proved himself since his arrival an acceptable fourth at the game.

"Make it hearts," Leschelles announced.

"Double," Satterfield stated, slowly scanning his hand.

"I'm stung again, I'll bet, unless the dummy is good and fat," the freckle-faced junior said. "Here goes." And he led out.

When the hand was half-finished, an interruption came in the form of a knock on the door.

"Damn it, who's got the stomach-ache now?" the little round doctor exclaimed, as he rose.

No one, it appeared, was subjected to the ailment which he had anathematized. Dukane

entered, followed by Kendle whom he introduced around.

"Go ahead with the game, and don't look sour, Medico," he said, pleasantly. "When you've finished this rubber, I'll take a few minutes of your time."

"You better get back to selling overalls or you'll lose your job."

"Tut, tut, I'm taking the rest cure."

The doctor resumed his seat and the game went forward with an occasional exchange among the players of satirical comments upon each other's skill. At the conclusion of the rubber Dukane gently but firmly removed the deck of cards from Satterfield's fingers, prefacing his act with a laconic apology.

"You come in here and kick over the kettle under a man's own roof," the doctor remarked. "If that isn't nerve! Next thing you'll be trying to operate on my patients."

"That might be worth while, I'll consider it later, but look here," Dukane pulled his chair forward. "I'm here strictly on business and business that will probably concern you all. I'm about to send out this message," and drawing forth a folded telegraph blank on which was written a line he handed it to the doctor,

then leaning back in his seat, he lighted a cigar and awaited results.

Doctor Morrison read it, stood suddenly up in his place staring at the yellow sheet.

"Boy, you're mad—insane!" he sputtered. "For heaven's sake look at that, Satterfield!" He thrust the paper into the man's hand.

A great deal was necessary to disturb the studious first assistant engineer. Adjusting his nose-glasses he carefully perused the writing, read it and then reread it; without comment he passed the paper to Leschelles after which he devoted himself to filling his pipe. During this by-play the correspondent sat quiet, though watching with alert eyes all that passed; for whatever concerned the youth, Hemple, was of interest to him and he drank in all of the scene that politeness to his host made permissible.

"Well, that's a funny skit to put on," the sandy-haired Leschelles said, uncertain as to where the joke lay. "Better go easy on that."

Dukane puffed his cigar, blew forth the smoke and calmly stated:

"That will be burning the wires before morning. I imagine that our friend, the journalist, would like to hear it."

"But—" Leschelles started to protest.

"You young devil, you dare not send such a fake as that!" the doctor cried.

"Read it to the man by your side, Leschelles, and see what he thinks about it as a fake."

Very soberly and in a hesitating voice the second assistant engineer read:

*"Dukane and Company,
San Francisco:*

Have discharged Corbetson and taken control. Will have Corbetson arrested at earliest opportunity for embezzlement and held till sheriff's arrival.

JAMES A. DUKANE, JR."

The journalist banged the table with his fist, looking about triumphantly, while his dazed companions turned their eyes on him.

"I knew it, I knew it!" he exclaimed.

"Knew what?" the doctor questioned.

"Why, that he's young Dukane,—old man Dukane's son who has been missing all this while and has kept the police and papers running around in circles to find him."

"Him—Hemple? I don't believe it," the doctor stated with emphatic incredulity. "He came in here a bum."

Then he sat suddenly down wiping his brow, for the sudden excitement aroused by this un-

heard of affair, the range of possibilities opened up by the youth's expressed intention regarding Corbetson, had started a fine dew of perspiration upon his brow. For a time no one said anything. The only sound was that of Dukane softly riffling the edges of the cards through his fingers; the lamp-light fell upon a glass case of instruments on one side which reflected the gleams lustroously; while the men remained in the various postures in which their bodies had set upon the reception of the news. All were thinking, all inwardly speculating upon how this strange event, if it should come to pass, would affect their various fortunes.

"As the case stands, Hemple claims to be the son of James A. Dukane, president of the Dukane Company," Satterfield said finally, in a measured voice. "It seems to me, with all due regard for Hemple—or Dukane junior, whichever he is—that the sending of this telegram, if he does send it, does not concern us; on the contrary, it is a matter resting solely among the chief, the company and the sender."

Dukane straightened up. "It concerns you all in this respect. I intend to take possession of the camp to-morrow. What then? Will you, can you maintain a neutral position? Cor-

betson will undoubtedly explode and that is the moment I'll need support."

Leschelles, who now perceived the youth invested with another personality even by the mere claim that he was the son of that vague but powerful individual, the head of the construction company, wrinkled his brow in concentrated thought. For him the situation abounded with romantic features, dramatic circumstances; to have an apparent hobo, who had entered camp ragged, mud-covered, disfigured by a black eye, blossom forth after a few weeks' sojourn into a dominant master, captivated his imagination. . He had liked Hemple; now the young fellow's prospective coup set his nerves tingling with excitement. But an engineer's training teaches one to calculate all the angles.

"You say you're Mr. Dukane's son; how do we know that?" he asked respectfully.

"Well, that's a pretty hard matter for me to prove at present. Your journalist friend has my description, I imagine, and—"

"Know it by heart," that worthy interrupted, "but here's the official one which has gone the rounds of the country"; he produced a sheet, worn and creased, from his pocket and read the details.

"Your eye, young chap, has been mauled again recently—"

"This evening."

"But otherwise it fits. All I want is to see your left arm and the birthmark which is here described."

Dukane rose, removed his coat and rolled up the shirt-sleeve of his left arm. Just below the elbow a brown oval mole half an inch in length lay like a lozenge upon the white flesh; it tallied exactly with the designated birthmark.

"You audacious young scamp, you'll have me really believing you're the missing boy—but of all things under heaven!" And the doctor, who spoke, turned first to one guest and then another to interrogate their countenances.

Dukane waved his hand for Kendle to speak. That gentleman who was placidly smoking a cigar nodded.

"I think he's the man he claims to be," he stated. "I don't know absolutely, as he's kept me from investigating his claim, but in my own mind I am perfectly convinced that he's young Dukane. Possibly my belief is entitled to some weight; I am the assistant-manager of the Corson Cement Company, which is one company supplying cement for the construc-

tion of this dam and which consequently is an interested party. It was on his request that I came here. You had best tell your whole story, Dukane. So far as I am concerned, gentlemen, I'm free to say that I've swallowed it whole and am ready to lend him every reasonable assistance—and now that I've my foot in, possibly some aid that is unreasonable.”

The others echoed his suggestion.

“Is this confidential, or am I at liberty to use the account?” the correspondent demanded, whose fingers itched to have hold of a pencil. “Here I am with the beat of the month—and I want it!”

“To be sure. Go ahead, if for nothing else than compensation for your pertinacity,” Jimmy said. “There’s a fine chance for you now to work up the burglar incident.”

“That we’ll leave out.”

Thereupon Dukane proceeded to narrate the story of his adventures from the time he left New York for San Francisco; his exchange of telegrams with his father, his arrival at Melton and his fight upon being robbed, his observation of the station agent mysteriously at work in the freight-car which held the bags of cement, his labor in the camp, his clerkship in the store

and finally the occasion and cause of Pennick's departure.

"Here is his confession," he concluded; and tossed the paper upon the table.

The doctor rose and moved on tip-toe to the door, which he locked, explaining over his shoulder that this affair had now gone too far to be interrupted. In order that the paper might be read to best advantage he placed the lamp in the middle of the table and adjusted its wick; the men drew their chairs closer, eagerness now apparent on the faces of all. Satterfield by virtue of his superior rank read the document which contained the evidence convicting Corbetson and Pennick of defrauding the workmen on the one hand and the Dukane company on the other in the conduct of the store. Except for the engineer's steady voice, the only sound was the swift whisper of the journalist's pencil as he transcribed the confession in shorthand.

"That is the first indictment, gentlemen," Dukane stated in business-like tones at the conclusion of the reading.

"Well, I'm damned—Corbetson of all men!" the doctor gasped.

Kendle's eyes twinkled.

"My young friend agreed to let Pennick go free," he remarked, "but when I drove him to Melton I decided that a good witness in the hand is worth two in the sagebrush, so I placed him where I can find him again if necessary."

"But I promised the fellow liberty," Jimmy frowned.

"Don't let that worry you. Pennick went where I wished of his own free will—for a money consideration."

"And is there more?" Leschelles inquired.

"Yes, that which is most important, that which kept me in Silver Peak Basin, in fact," Dukane continued. "First, I suspected something curious because of the station agent's action in changing the cement bags, then next because of the talk of graft which was rife among the workmen and finally because of the fraudulent construction of the dam—fraudulent as every man who stops to think must know it to be; literally a hollow sham. I knew the Corson Cement Company would be interested in knowing why their cement was put into another company's bags, therefore I wrote them to send a man. Mr. Kendle came. To him I explained what I had discovered and what further I suspected. His company does not like to have its

cement tampered with, so he joined my investigation, indeed, the chief investigation has been his. He will tell you what he discovered."

Kendle here took up the story. On leaving Melton, with Pennick in his charge, he had gone to a small city, a hundred miles west, and from there had wired to Dukane and Company for the office address of the Roseland Cement Company and to his own concern for the contract figures of the amount of cement to be supplied. With this information in his possession he had that evening gone to Denver, which had been forwarded to him as the city in which the Roseland Company had its headquarters. High in one of the lofty buildings he had located the offices, where a dapper youth talked cement to him glibly. If he were in the market the young manager stated, his company would like to bid on his contract; they manufactured an especially high grade of cement. Where were their mills? There were three, the largest plant being at Melton, Nevada. He placed a photograph of a magnificent plant in Kendle's hands and Kendle, who knew cement companies as he knew his fingers, recognized it as a photograph of a celebrated Texas company's mill.

The youth also presented him with samples of Melton cement.

"Here are the real Melton works," Kendle concluded, handing forth a kodak view of the ramshackle building which at Dukane's suggestion he had examined and of course found abandoned.

"Do you mean to say that Corbetson is in this swindle?" Satterfield asked quietly.

"Here are the facts as my own company knows them. This dam is supposedly being built of solid, reinforced concrete. A certain amount of cement is required; the contract to supply this was divided between the Roseland concern and our own, both to provide cement of a certain test. And yet as you know the dam is not being so built, is using in fact but one-half of the cement which was bid for. Our company is furnishing its full contract figure; likewise the Roseland Company is doing so, for in the information furnished me by my people, Dukane & Company's San Francisco office has regularly receipted for, through Corbetson, definite shipments of Roseland cement and paid for the same. That, gentlemen, puts the matter up to your chief. I'll be glad when the proper time comes for him to explain many

things; why the Roseland company, with a fraudulent rating in Bradstreet's and with a closed mill, yet makes cement and does business, why the agent at Melton puts our cement in Roseland bags, why twice as much cement as comes into camp is receipted for, where and by whose hand false freight way-bills are made and why the dam is being constructed in one fashion when it is supposed to be built in another."

"That's a black case," the doctor exclaimed, his round fat face the background of many emotions. "Is that all?"

"No, that's not all," Dukane said, meaningly.

And as the final piece in the puzzle he related his suspicion and discovery of the real maps in the chest in the office. Satterfield for the first time showed himself profoundly affected; that Corbetson had made him an unconscious assistant in a gigantic fraud cut him to the very soul. He removed his eye-glasses and wiped and re-wiped them. Leschelles was utterly swallowed up and could only look blankly from one speaker to another. Such perfidy as had been here disclosed he had never dreamt of; it all seemed above his head, with himself a mere

uncounted atom kicked about at the bottom of it.

"My bruised eye has been spoken of," Dukane went on. "Well, I came by it as a result of this business. The chief knows that I know he is guilty; he is too cowardly to strike at me himself, but to-day I found a decoy note purporting to be from Miss Crofton, in which it was stated that she would be riding on the ridge this evening. I scribbled a line in reply at supper time and sent it to her saying that I would come. When I arrived on the ridge Lantry and eight men burst out of cover. I held them off with a gun for a while, but they caught me unaware. Just as the row was at its height, Miss Crofton rode up and scattered them with her whip and pony. In other words she probably saved my life; for Lantry and his gang would have found an excuse to kill me. They did not deny that Corbetson was paying them to do the job. Well, that's how I got my black eye—but two of them carried away bullets and they're no doubt in the Tunneltown camp now having them dug out. There, you have the whole story, men, up to date."

"Oh, this is worth waiting for!" the reporter barked joyously, writing with industrious pen-

cil. "Wait till I work this stuff up, just wait!"

"It's too much for me," the doctor vociferated, throwing up his hands. "All this going on under our noses, while we were pottering around and trying to rake up excitement playing bridge!"

The others said nothing; this last revelation was too grave for unconsidered discussion. In the eyes of all of them the figure of the youth acquired a new significance; and yet the whole tale, the entire succession of events from Dukane's arrival at Melton to the present moment when he sat before them with the incontrovertible evidence of a late physical struggle upon his face, the secret and criminal policy pursued by the chief engineer, seemed a wild and preposterous phantasy of some imaginative brain, which would presently be dispelled by a sane word. Satterfield sat with his chin in his hand, brooding; Leschelles scratched one side of his head continually, as if he was determined to scratch forth an idea from his cropped sandy hair; the doctor from time to time fussily blew his nose.

"Well, that's the case I present against Corbetson," Dukane stated, after a lengthy pause.

"The man's a villain and a scoundrel. Tomorrow I take charge and will keep charge until the San Francisco office sends a representative. When I dispatch this telegram I shall send another to the sheriff of this county at the same time, asking him to come and arrest the chief. He should be here by night. But meanwhile what can I count on from you gentlemen?" He looked about him.

"What can we do?" Leschelles inquired, helplessly.

"This, refuse to obey Corbetson."

"But—but he's the chief!"

"At nine o'clock I will be in the office chair. Will you, or will you not, take orders from me?"

Dukane gazed at the other young fellow, who turned his look away to Satterfield as if seeking an older head to decide at this parting of the ways. The older engineer lifted his eyes and as if for the first time seeing Dukane, carefully regarded him.

"It's a great deal you ask," he said, at length, "to demand of us to become insubordinate to our authorized superior, the man in command here. You have no credentials, you give us your sole unsupported word that you are Mr.

Dukane's son. Granted that you are, how are we to know that your action will be endorsed by the company? By your own story—and pardon me the liberty—by your past record, neither your father nor your father's company placed any particular confidence in you and never at any time gave you authority. You were ordered to come here to inspect the work and report upon it, that and nothing more. Is such not the case?"

"It is, but—"

Satterfield waved him to silence. "You want us to throw our lot in with you when you don't even know but that the company will discountenance what you do. That is the way it stands with us. What further reason have you to advance why we should join you?"

A warm flush mounted Dukane's face, a flush of resentment, disappointment, defeat.

"I have none," he said.

Again Satterfield removed his glasses and wiped them, carefully to place them upon his nose. Suddenly he struck the table with clenched fist. His lips were compressed, his lean form taut.

"I will tell you the reason," he explained. "Because a man should be true to the salt he

eats, loyal to the money he's paid by, honest to the work he sets his hand to. If I thought the company was building this dam fraudulently—and I've lain awake nights, gentlemen, turning the thought over in my mind—I would consider it my duty to resign and expose the vile work. Fraudulent it is, of that I am now convinced. I am sick of seeing the flimsy, veiled construction that is going on here; I had already made up my mind to quit. But I am now certain that the company has gone ahead in good faith. I feel myself bound to no man, even if he is my superior, by any cords of loyalty when he pursues a disloyal and dishonest course. At such a time my loyalty goes to the fountain-head; I shall do as I think right without regard either to reward or punishment. And when I give my allegiance to what I consider right, it is no half-allegiance. Therefore, I shall go the whole length—you can command me, Mr. Dukane."

"Hurra!" shouted Leschelles, "I'm in too, if I never have another job."

Dukane was genuinely affected by this manifestation of good-will, coming as it did so speedily upon the heels of what he had considered a refusal, and profoundly affected by the

engineer's clean straight loyalty to his father's company. Unable to speak for the moment he gripped their hands and shook them vigorously.

"We shall stand or fall with you, Jimmy, my boy," the doctor cried, whose face beamed.

"But we won't fall; that's where your help comes in," Jimmy answered.

"If I may offer a suggestion—" the journalist interjected calmly.

"Shoot away, old man."

"Keep your little conspiracy dark until someone is sent from the San Francisco office, after which this man Corbetson can be moved out in good order."

For a moment Jimmy stared at him in astonishment.

"What—and spoil my show! No sir,"—he pounded the table till the lamp rattled and the doctor jumped to hold it—"not on your life! The governor and the San Francisco office and all the rest of them think I'm no good, that I'm lost, that I can't eat without somebody putting the spoon to my mouth—I'll show 'em! This is my funeral and I intend to run it till the last clod rattles on the coffin. When the smoke clears, they'll see me sitting all serene on top

the heap with my nose in the air inquiring who they are and what they want. More than that, I intend to sit there till the dam is built and built right. After I've done the rough work, nobody else shall come in to put on the gilt. Yes, sir, this is my funeral. James A. Dukane, Sr., can come in as one of the mourners, but that's all, as he'll find out when I get busy with him."

"Good—good," cried Leschelles, wriggling with delight. "But won't the chief fight?"

"Possibly—probably. It'll be necessary to make provision for that. He's in so deep now that he'll be apt to make a final stroke to get possession long enough to destroy the papers and whatever other evidence there is against him. But I'll never let him into the office, once he's turned out. What we've got to look out for is Lantry and his gang of ruffians. Corbetson will run to them first thing. Come, pull up to the table and let us lay a plan."

Following his example the others drew up their chairs for a council of war. Now that they had enlisted on Dukane's side they flung themselves into the conspiracy heart and soul. Fresh cigars were lighted and pipes filled anew,

whereupon they fell into a discussion of the "ifs and ands" of the proposed upheaval in the government of Silver Peak Camp.

"To-morrow will be a bloody day in our country's history," the correspondent remarked jocosely, from the spot where he had retired to write out in detail his account of the resurrection of Dukane junior.

He would get no sleep that night, he perceived, as he had been instructed by Dukane that no messages should be permitted to go on the wires at Melton, since these would alarm the station-agent, who in turn would inform Corbetson of events by telephone. The next station west of Melton was ten miles distant and the prospect of a journey there by night not alluring, but his "great story" discounted the obstacles of this. As soon as it was written he would set out for the place on horseback in order to be back by morning, when he anticipated further meaty copy.

The members of the conclave paid no attention to his joking comment. What Corbetson, enraged by his forced deposal, made desperate by discovery of his criminal course, would do engaged their deepest consideration. They could not agree.

"He'll skip, if I know the man," the doctor stated.

"Corbetson's more cautious than brave, more cunning than bold, but one can never foretell what any man will do in an extremity," Satterfield replied, "for one can never know all of the conflicting currents that clash in the mind, or choose those which will finally determine him upon a policy."

Dukane looked about the circle.

"It really doesn't matter what the man does, if we're prepared for the worst," said he. "Let us figure out what the worst can be, then make ready to meet it."

"Good advice," Satterfield approved. And with a smile, he continued. "Our new general is already disclosing elements of greatness."

Thereupon they put their heads together to prepare the morrow's campaign.

As for the man against whom they conspired, he lay tossing on his bed and gnawing his nails; for Lantry had told him of the failure of the evening's attack upon the boy, told him with curses of the coming of the girl and of the wounding of two of the men by bullets. The black devils that darkness conjures up in the minds of the guilty rode astride his soul.

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW CHIEF IN COMMAND

ONCE more Dukane and his faithful servitor, Hop Spencer, conversed. The hour was near nine o'clock of the following morning and as Jimmy, leaning in apparent indolence upon a corner of a showcase, indulged in gentle banter with his admiring minion, he nevertheless kept a wary eye upon the office within the adjoining half of the building.

"I'm about to make you storekeeper in your own right," he addressed the cripple, "raise you up to a position of trust, a place of honor and a seat of power. In other words, you shall tread in the footsteps of your famous predecessors, Pennick and Hemple."

"Me! Say, you do like to talk hot air, don't you?" Spencer stated, without, however, any note of derogation.

"You do me an injustice, Hop. I speak only the truth. From now on until the dam is finished you are the storekeeper and commis-

sary with a stipend of one hundred dollars per month."

"All right, I'll make a lovely merchant," the other grinned, to carry on the joke.

Jimmy crossed to where a looking glass hung from a shelf and examined his bruised eye; it was swollen half shut from the force of the boot-heel which had struck it and was deep indigo in color. Fresh disgust possessed him as he tenderly fingered the optic, for by previous experience he knew that it would retain this mourning color for two or three weeks. In truth, it caused him to look both disreputable and desperate. Would Enid continue to love him looking thus?

"Tell me, Hop, what will reduce this swelling?" he inquired.

"Fat meat—a piece of bacon."

"That doesn't sound very nice."

"It does the business, that's the main thing. Wait a minute, I'll fix you up."

So presently with a slice of bacon in one hand and a red bandana handkerchief in the other, Spencer proceeded to apply his remedy and bandage it fast.

"Now, my boy, the store will rest on your shoulders to-day," Dukane stated, briskly. "I

expect to be very busy with other matters. There will possibly be some excitement around this building and in case it becomes too strong lock the doors and keep out of sight. Meanwhile, let us see what there is in the way of arms and ammunition."

With the wondering Hop at his heels he made an inventory of the aforesaid class of stock, with the result that when he concluded there were gathered four Winchester rifles, six shot-guns, fourteen revolvers and a considerable quantity of shells for the weapons. These the two youths hid in a handy place under the counter near the door leading into the office, heaping wearing apparel on top to conceal them from sight.

Fortune smiled upon Dukane. Perceiving that Corbetson had descended the slope to the power house and that the auspicious moment for an aggressive move had come he strode across the office, felt in his pocket to learn that his revolver was safe, and planted himself in the revolving chair at the chief's desk. Thus, easily like many another greater assault against tyrannical power, the first step in the Silver Peak revolution was initiated. Jimmy hooked

his thumbs in the arm holes of his vest, leaned back and took a deep breath.

"Now for wild cries and gnashing of teeth," said he; but as the chief engineer did not at once return and his roving eye lighted on the pigeon holes of the desk stuffed with papers, he experienced an acute attack of curiosity. Every folded sheet, every corner of an envelope, every dog-eared end that pointed towards him seemed mysterious with hidden secrets and heavy with portentous facts; they invited him, as a locked cupboard invites a child. Should he or should he not read them? Ethics did not at the moment particularly appeal to Dukane; and indeed, considering that Corbetson had conspired to bring about if not his death at least his hurt, it is to be wondered that there rose in his mind any scruples whatever. But they swiftly withered under the heat of his indignation when he recalled yesterday's events. He lighted a cigar, pulled out the contents of a pigeon-hole and fell to an examination.

It was half an hour after this, when he had advanced through the reading of half the desk's papers with the result of discovering only a few letters which seemed to cast an illusive light on

the chief's schemes, that Corbetson walked into the office. Thunderstruck, he halted in his tracks. Jimmy took a tighter grip on his cigar with his teeth and gazed around at the man.

"Come in," he said, "and have a chair."

"Reading my papers!" the man cried harshly, springing forward.

Dukane slipped his revolver forth.

"Sit down," he commanded.

"You thief, you scoundrel—"

"Sit down as I tell you," was the repeated command, this time enforced by the weapon. "And don't address those names to me, Mr. Corbetson, if you wish to keep a whole skin. Go ahead, what do you want to say?"

By now the engineer was seated, a picture of rage and baffled ferocity.

"What are you doing here! I'll have you in jail for this, see if I don't."

Jimmy removed his cigar. Watching closely to see that the other made no sudden spring upon him, Dukane reflected on how best to put his answer.

"I have taken charge here; you're out of a job, Mr. Corbetson."

"You have—*what!*" the other half rose to his feet.

"I think you caught my meaning. Hereafter the construction of the dam is in my hands. In order to make the matter wholly clear to you, I'll state that my name is Dukane, Jimmy Dukane, son of the president of the company of the same name."

"You lie, you thief! You're nothing but a hobo and a bluffer, you came here in rags and mud and you'll leave the same way. I don't know what your game is, but inside of thirty minutes I'll have you locked up hard and fast."

"Tut—tut, sit where you are. Do you think you can persuade Lantry to try another murder? You may not know it, Mr. Corbetson, but Lantry told me last evening when he thought he had me caught, that you were the man who paid him to cut my throat."

At this sudden accusation the blood receded from the engineer's face; he glanced away from the youth, then back at him again.

"Nothing of the kind," he declared, finally. "What attack are you talking about?"

"Then there was the decoy note, too. That was rather crafty of you, for a fact, but Enid Crofton chanced to come riding to the ridge and spoiled your whole plan. Mr. Corbetson, I intend to see you sent up the road for several

things, of which this is one of them. You, to stoop to having murder done!"

A fresh access of anger swept Corbetson. "Get out of here, or I'll throw you out!"

"Try it," Jimmy answered grimly, "I didn't hesitate to shoot a couple of your hired assassins last night, I won't hesitate to shoot you. Get out yourself—and keep out! You're done. Not a paper leaves this desk or this office."

Before the sudden menace of the weapon thrust forward anew, the engineer shrank away, leaping to his feet and retreating a step. Dukane also arose. But Corbetson did not depart; the utter preposterousness of the event, of Hemple who had been a common laborer seeking to drive him forth from what was rightly his own, deprived him of the power of locomotion.

"See here, Hemple, are you mad?" he asked, at last.

"I'm sane enough to shoot straight, if that's what you want to know."

"But this is my office, I'm engineer here, am in charge. You're joking to talk about driving me out of my own place. Go back to your work in the store where you belong and be ra-

tional. If the camp learns that you're acting in this crazy fashion, that you're not responsible, it will shoot you down like a mad dog. Come, stop this nonsense."

"Am I crazy when I say you're defrauding the company in the store?"

The chief's look became lowering. "Enough of that."

"And mad also when I say you're swindling the company in its dam construction?"

"Tell that to the camp and they'll certainly know you're crazy!"

"But you know differently, my friend, don't you?" Dukane went on, "Just as you and I know these maps that you give Satterfield and Leschelles are false, while the true ones are locked up in the chest yonder. Yes, you and I know just how crazy I am, as we know just how guilty you are."

"What do you want?"

"Aha, you now see a light and are ready to talk terms. What do you offer?"

"It's money you're after then—blackmail."

"That's not a nice word, but let's hear what you've got to say. After what you had Lantry try last night I won't be bought cheap. And besides you have been making a pretty good

thing out of the store and various other sidelines."

"I want a day to think this over."

"No, no. Many things might happen to me in a day. I have no reason to trust you; in fact, you'd eat my heart this very minute if I gave you an opportunity. There never can be much confidence between crooks, so I must have your answer at once."

Lightning flashed from Corbetson's eyes at these insults. Truly, had he possessed but the physical courage to defy the youth's weapon, he would have rejoiced to leap upon the usurper and tear his flesh in pieces. Every word the other spoke cut like a knife, laying open his villainy, showing the blackness of his soul, penetrating to a core of infamy which until now he never had permitted himself wholly to see. Ay, he could have torn to shreds the bodies of both the boy and himself in a bitter sort of pleasure. Suddenly, there was a clutch at his heart, a black veil of dizziness in his brain. He felt Dukane catch him by the arm and lead him across the room, then the cool outer air blew upon his face and gradually the black emptiness passed away.

Dukane stood in the door looking out at him.

"That whiskey's bad for your heart," he said.

With return of his senses there came a rush of new rage to Corbetson. He turned about, he shook his fist at the youth.

"I'm not done with you," he exclaimed, between his teeth. "Next time you won't have any come back. You better skip while you've a chance, for I'm going to turn the whole camp loose on you."

"Going to try and bite after all, are you?" Dukane replied. "Well, I'm not going to skip and, further, I'm not done with you by a long way. Don't seek to come into this office again—it won't be a healthy attempt."

Without response Corbetson turned and went swiftly towards the dam.

Jimmy did not immediately leave the spot where he stood. For glancing about after having delivered his ultimatum and experiencing that relief which comes upon the fixing of a definite issue, he perceived Enid Crofton riding towards him from the west. At that moment therefore nothing in Silver Peak Basin, which is as much as to say in the world, could have dragged him away from that point of vantage. She came forward at an easy gallop, riding with the unconscious grace with which her lithe

figure was endowed. When she observed him in the door she neck-reined her pony to the spot and pulled up with an abrupt stop.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded.

To see her was in Jimmy's mind the desire to be near her. He stepped forth, advancing to caress the pony's nose which the animal thrust out towards his hand.

"Tell you what?" he inquired.

"Who you are?"

"I thought that I did."

"You didn't tell me all."

Jimmy smiled up at her with his lips and one unbandaged eye. "Won't you alight? It's not very comfortable talking to one from a saddle."

This statement seemed worthy of profound meditation; at least Enid appeared to turn it over in her mind, at considerable length, finally to yield, dismounting and letting the pony's reins trail. Her manner, however, was accusatory.

"No, you didn't tell me that you were the son of this Mr. Dukane whose company is building the dam," she announced. "It was only after I was alone at home and was thinking about your name that it flashed into my

mind that you *might be*. I went to papa and asked him Mr. Dukane's first name and middle initial—they were the same as yours. So I knew you were his son—are you?"

"I am."

Enid had drawn off her gloves; she now began to slip them on once more.

"That ends it then; I can never marry you."

Jimmy stared at her, unable to credit his ears.

"What!" he shouted, finally. "Not marry me!"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I didn't know you were the son of a man who is immensely wealthy."

"What difference does that make?"

"A great deal."

"Nonsense, you're going to marry me just the same, yes, even if I have to disown the governor. But stop!" A bright smile suddenly illuminated his countenance. "That isn't necessary, for he's disowned me. So you needn't worry about him, or his money."

"Then he doesn't love you."

"He fairly hates me. So we can be married at once."

"At once!" she rose hastily.

"Well—that is—when this row is over."

Breathlessly she inquired what "row," her mind all at once alert to extraneous matters, plied him with questions and drew from his reluctant lips the statement that he had deposed Corbetson and taken charge of the dam camp, theoretically if not actually, which probably would create a disturbance.

"Why did you do anything so bold?" she demanded.

"I don't call bouncing this miserable chief anything very courageous, not him."

"You mustn't be killed, Jimmy," she said, softly.

"People don't get killed in this sort of an affair. And anyway I'll stay alive because I want to marry you."

As if that were the most conclusive reason in the world he nodded, took her cheeks between his hands and kissed her on the lips. In an ecstasy of delight she closed her eyes, hardly breathing, unmoving, losing herself in the rapture of the moment.

"I want you just as you are, just Jimmy," she said, afterward, "Jimmy, poor, disowned and with a dear battered face."

Jimmy agreed to continue poor and disowned, but protested against the maintenance of a black-and-blue eye. Adjusting the bandage which had slipped a trifle he led her out to the pony which stood patiently awaiting his mistress.

"And where is Mr. Corbetson?" she half-whispered, when she sat in her saddle.

"Raising legions."

She began to tug at her gloves in uncertainty.

"I don't know what to do; I ought to stay here if anything is going to happen to you."

"You must go home and stay there," he ordered sternly.

Glancing at him she compressed her lips and replied that she would do what she thought fit, with which declaration of independence she drew the pony's head about and set off homeward at a foot pace. A sigh of relief escaped Jimmy; he would rather be with Enid than any other person in the world, but there were occasions when work must be done, unpleasant work, and it was best not to have girls around; which, taking into consideration all the circumstances of the previous evening might have been called an egotistical view.

On a sudden Dukane perceived that work

had stopped on the dam. The men, small as ants, streamed off the structure and along the road that led back to camp. A sense of apprehension, a consciousness of impending crisis, seized the watcher, as with hand shading eyes against the sun, he noted this unwonted occurrence. Had Corbetson indeed succeeded in raising the camp against him, as the chief had vowed to do? Jimmy experienced a tingling down to his very toes. But he was not the one to be caught unprepared, even though the prospects were dark; he ran to the store and bade Hop close and lock all its doors, then he retraced his steps to the front of the office where he took up his station at the portal.

Down upon the slope below him the laborers began to arrive, moving in groups that mingled and dissolved, stirred as he could see at even so great a distance by some excitement. In their midst he made out the various persons who might play an important role in succeeding events: Corbetson, Satterfield, Leschelles, Casey, the time-keeper, and others. As the crowd drew near, the gang at the mixer caught the infection, flung down their shovels and joined the concourse.

Just at that instant the reporter trotted up from the west on his jaded horse.

"Guess I'm in time," he said, "and, I imagine, just in time."

His face was haggard from loss of sleep and caked with perspiration and dust as a result of his long ride to and from the railroad.

"Yes, you're in time," Dukane rejoined. "I gave the chief his walking papers as per schedule; this is the flare-back."

The reporter leaped down, thrust his hand through the bridle-rein and turned to the speaker.

"If they crowd in too close, I'll pull the horse across the door. That will stop them for a moment. But, by Jove, if that whole bunch is on the war-path—" He concluded with a long whistle.

"They're not, not all of them, I'll swear."

The workmen were now drawing near. In the fore strode Corbetson and Lantry, with half a dozen of the latter's followers close at their heels. When they were within ten paces Jimmy jerked forth his revolver and ordered them to stop.

"You, Corbetson—and you, Lantry,—I'll

drop you both in your tracks if you make a move towards me."

"And so will I," a shrill voice called over Jimmy's shoulder.

Hop Spencer stood in the door holding a Winchester.

"Now, Casey, speak up for these men," Dukane said. "What is the meaning of this demonstration?"

The timekeeper thus addressed, grinned, "The chief says you threw him out."

"Right you are."

"And I always said you'd come into trouble, ye fightin' spalpeen."

Jimmy raised a hand.

"The Irish never loved a man less because he enjoyed fighting. Do you know, Casey, and you others, why I threw out your chief? I will tell you. Because in the first place my name is Dukane, and Dukane and Company fires any man it wants to who works for it. Next, this black scoundrel, Corbetson, has been robbing you in the store by selling you pants and tobacco at two prices instead of one. Hereafter your pants will cost you no more than they should cost any honest man. Let the chief stand by and deny it and I will

read a paper to you that Pennick wrote and signed before he went away in which he tells just how he and Corbetson fixed the game to skin you out of your hard-earned dollars, putting the same in their own pockets—”

“Don’t you believe him!” Corbetson shouted, interrupting him, “It’s all a lie—a lie! He’s no more Dukane than I am, and your pants were sold for cost.”

A wild hub-bub of voices broke forth, men shouting, exclaiming, calling to one another.

“What is all this?” Casey at last demanded, when the noise died down.

“Just what I said. Not only that, but I’ve others who know the truth—the chief’s own engineers, the doctor—”

Corbetson made a fierce gesture.

“Satterfield—Leschelles! You dare not let this young fool and scoundrel deceive you!”

But the two engineers walked forth to the spot where Dukane stood. Satterfield carefully wiped his eye-glasses.

“Men, so far as Mr. Leschelles, the doctor and I are concerned, we stand with young Dukane here,” said he. “Though he came into camp looking like a hobo, yet he’s the son of the president of the company.”

Corbetson stared at the speaker; his face went white and he clenched his palms. But the next instant he fiercely rejected the notion that such a catastrophe as this, that the boy could indeed be Dukane's son, had befallen him.

"It's false—and you're all in the plot."

Jimmy looked at him coldly, then once more addressed the laborers.

"This is an affair that doesn't concern you, men, except that hereafter you can buy stuff for half what you've been paying," he stated. "Mr. Corbetson and I will settle our business between ourselves. All you have to do is keep working."

One yelled to know if they should be paid.

"Not only paid," their new and youthful chief responded, "but beginning this morning every man gets a raise of twenty-five cents a day."

Sudden and heavy silence reigned for an instant, then as if from one throat there burst a mighty shout. The crowd buzzed like a swarm of bees and with a final hurrah turned and swept downward towards the dam, laughing, shouting and sweeping Corbetson and his few silent supporters along with them in their jovial rush.

"That clever bit of financial diplomacy ends the matter," the reporter said.

"On the contrary, it only begins it," Satterfield replied.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SKIRMISH

DURING the noon hour Satterfield, Leschelles and Dukane remained with their heads together in the office. The chest, whose locks had been forced, gave up the maps which it had concealed and the three men were busily employed in comparing the false sheets with the true.

"No wonder he's crazy to regain possession here," the sandy-haired second assistant exclaimed indignantly, "with all this evidence against him still in existence, besides what may be in that." And he pointed at the safe which remained closed, since the combination was unknown to any except Corbetson. "Even some of the money he's stolen through his tricks may be locked up inside it, which he'd naturally want to get before he skipped the country."

"Unless he has sent it away to some secret bank account that he carries," Satterfield

vouchsafed. "The fortunate thing about it all is that you unmasked the fellow, Dukane, before he reaped the full profit of his rascally cement scheme. He was just getting fairly started. The foundation of the dam is solid enough and built according to honest construction—he did not dare to begin his flimsy work until the forms were above the surface of the stream; that would have been too outrageously criminal. We'll have to clean out what rubbish has since been dumped into the shell and reconstruct those parts."

"Of course," Dukane said. "Begin at once."

"It's good to know that we're working on the square at last," Leschelles said, heartily. "We'll tear that rotten stuff out in a hurry."

For perhaps fifteen minutes more they examined, compared and calculated over the maps, when Casey, the time-keeper, and Callahan, who had lost his arm in the mixer and whom Dukane had succeeded as boss of the mixing-gang, burst in upon them.

"The devil's to pay!" Casey cried, his eyes ablaze. "They've set a barrel of free whiskey over yonder in a ravine, spread the word in camp an' the boys are goin' to it like flies to

sugar. It's under the belt they're hittin' ye, Jimmy."

Dukane and the engineers rushed to the door. Men moved by twos and threes away from the camp along the base of the ridge towards where a gully screened by bushes and trees creased the hillside two hundred yards distant. Some of the men walked leisurely, masking their purpose under an air of casual strolling; some went with hunched shoulders, shamefacedly casting surreptitious glances back at the camp; while bolder spirits, casting aside all pretense, moved straight ahead, joking and laughing aloud. But that a definite idea dominated them all, that each sought the same goal, was apparent as they converged upon the mouth of the little ravine. About the door of one of the bunk-houses thirty or forty men loitered, these the steadier workmen for whom liquor had no attraction.

"Whisper whiskey to that bunch of work-easys and they forget all about an increase in pay," Callahan growled, jerking his thumb towards the deserters.

"Yes, and half an hour from now it's a howling mob of wolves we'll have," Casey supplemented.

"Do you think they'll make trouble?" Jimmy asked, anxiously.

"And for why not? What did ye think Lantry and Corbetson haled a barrel of whiskey in a wagon from Tunneltown for if not to give ye a warm entertainment. When that scum is crazy drunk, they'll do anything—smash things for choice."

Jimmy looked at the gully, then at the workmen who remained.

"Could we run them off?"

"Could we run off a herd of thirty cattle from water? They would give their lives for that whiskey, now their noses smell it. Be wise and let 'em be—but get ready, say I. I've seen a camp or two wrecked by whiskey in me time."

"Sure, ye can't stop 'em now, except with a whole army—and maybe not so," Callahan corroborated.

At that instant the one o'clock whistle blew. In answer there came a faint, derisive shout from the gully. Jimmy gazed hard in that direction, his jaw hard and his lips set; for he was exceedingly angry and exceedingly determined—angry that Corbetson had stolen a march on him, though suspecting that the inspiration for

the plan was Lantry's, determined to deal with the traitorous crew in lusty fashion. Recollection of his short-lived triumph came to torment him.

"Call up those fellows," said he, nodding towards the workmen before the bunk-house, who were in quandary whether or not to proceed to their customary labor.

Casey raised a shout, calling them to the office and presently they stood before the door in an expectant group. In hot, short sentences Jimmy expressed his opinion of the deserters, then poured a stream of praises upon his listeners for their loyalty. Would they stand by him through thick and thin, or would they not? That was what he wanted to know. If they did, they should receive ten dollars a day until order was restored, or if hurt in the row which would probably come, until they were well. He did not want men who would quit in a pinch, but who would fight till Lantry and his gang were whipped. He was now hiring them to fight and not to work—and let those who were ready sign their names on a paper, so it would be known who earned the money. Besides, whoever backed him up now, should afterwards receive a dollar a day more on his wages as long as he worked on the dam.

"Pass round the roll of honor, Casey," he concluded, much satisfied with his extemporaneous oration.

A cheer greeted his offer. The men crowded eagerly forward to sign under so lavish a patron. Satterfield, who had looked on in grave silence, turned to his young chief, regarding him quizzically.

"You're prodigal of promises," he said.

"I heard my father once say never to count pennies in a crisis, besides I'm not paying the bill myself."

"Will the company pay it, I wonder?"

"They will," Jimmy answered decisively, "even if I have to club them into it."

Half an hour later the youth's cohort sat on the ground in front of the office, forty-two in number, each armed with a stout axe-helve or shovel-handle drawn from the company's supplies. Callahan, Casey and Miller, the chief teamster, who had been appointed to act as leaders, from time to time, gave them advice upon the advantage of sticking together and fighting in close order. Within the office were gathered the others—Satterfield and Leschelles, Kendle, the doctor, Hop Spencer, the reporter, and Dukane. As they talked the distant shouts and yells which had begun to arise

from the gully, making plain that the liquor was working on the hundred-odd drinkers, were borne through the open door upon the light southern breeze to their ears.

The danger-points—for danger points they would unquestionably become once Corbetson and Lantry succeeded in infecting the men with their own desperate spirit—would be the office, the engine-house, and the powder-house. While the office would be the former chief's main goal, the drunken mob of workmen would undoubtedly seek, if baffled, to destroy whatever part of the plant they conceived to be most susceptible of damage. Any serious breakage in the power-, mixing-, or stone-crushing machinery would cause infinite labor to repair and long delay. The stone-crusher, off across the basin and away from the camp, had a crew and bunk-house of its own and to judge by the steady muffled rumble sounding steadily from that direction its men as yet knew nothing of the revolution going on at the dam. It would have to take its own chance, for to dispatch thither a portion of the small force waiting before the door would be only to divide the troop and invite complete disaster. As for the engine-house,—at that very instant in walked

the engineer, grimy and oil-splashed. He had come for information, he explained, and to ask if the fires should be kept going or be banked.

"If it's only them drunken hoboës," said he, when the situation had been made clear, "leave them to me. I'll attach a two-inch hose to the boiler and the first head that shows at a window will get his hair scalded off. Sure, boiling water's the stuff—I hope they come." With which declaration he betook himself back to the engine-house to put his peculiar artillery in order.

"And it's him will do it too," Casey grinned, who had been listening at the door.

A period of inaction followed. The company of defenders who had rallied to Dukane's standard lay before the office in all the postures of sprawling ease. They joked among themselves, grown lively at the prospect of a *mêlée*; they indulged in horse-play, rapping each other upon the shoulders with the staves they carried or poking neighbors in the ribs; and as if injury were the most trivial thing in the world, bantered one another upon a prospective sojourn in the hospital. The sun flooded the basin out of a cloudless sky. Only the unmoving mixer, the silent trams, the abandoned

dam, seemed strange in their present idleness.

Dukane and his associates speculated upon what degree of drunkenness the absent workmen might arrive at; if they should not be checked in their drinking and persuaded away from the gully the prospective attack would hiss down into nothing, like a damp firecracker. If, however, Lantry could master them at the right stage, they would be ripe for any mischief. The reporter alone was busy, having withdrawn to one side where he should be undisturbed while weaving the tale of the progressing adventures of James A. Dukane, junior. For once in his journalistic career he found a situation completely to his satisfaction—high lights, low lights, tableau and plot, hero, heroine and villain; and, ah! all that was needed to perfect the last flourish was to dip his pen in blood.

"There they come," Satterfield stated finally, who had been standing at a window gazing through a pair of field-glasses at the mouth of the ravine.

A group of men emerged. They halted, staring in the direction of the camp and evidently undetermined whether to advance or to remain. But others straggled forth to join

them and then at last came the whole swarm. Through the glasses they were plainly in view, as they shifted and moved about Corbetson and Lantry who were addressing them. Then they raised a sudden cheer which was borne on the light wind to the men who awaited their coming, and started forward in a dense, disorderly mass.

Outside the office the faithful band had risen to their feet, all at once silent, watchful, earnest, expectant, knitting their brows or chewing their tobacco-quids more quickly. Callahan walked up and down in front of them.

"I've only one hand, men, but I can whip any six of the swilling beasts," he was saying. "You will warm to it, you will love the work before we're done with 'em. You never made such easy money. And if you would make 'em sick of the job, rap 'em on the shins. It's the shins you want to hit for in the beginning, then when they double up, take 'em on top of the head. That's strategy, men,—and it's Callahan who knows all about a shindy."

The men grinned in appreciation of his advice, half a dozen voicing their assurance.

"It's a shame we can't give you something better to practice on," Casey said, with twin-

kling eyes, "but you must excuse us, for the party was got up in a hurry; next time we'll do better."

A full laugh greeted this sally and a couple of burly "hard-rock" men clapped him on the back.

"What's the bounty on pelts?" one cried.

That the body of approaching laborers had perceived them was made evident even at a distance by a chorus of yells, jeers, cat-calls and taunting shouts. From men merely having a thirst for liquor they had become inflamed by whiskey and provocative talk until they imagined themselves the victims of some trick. A number were already pretty far gone, staggering in their walk and lurching unsteadily, flinging their hands up in dazed gestures, being impelled forward by the mere example of the greater number. But it was not at them the defenders gazed; there were the active, belligerent incensed ruffians, by far the greater number, who must be dealt with. Already they were hurling curses at Dukane, at the engineers, at everybody but themselves.

In their midst strode Lantry and Corbetson. The former led in the demonstration directed at the office, the latter moved unsteadily and



In their midst strode Lantry and Corbetson

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with a reckless, desperate, liquor-flushed look on his face. Clearly he had thrown all caution to the winds, drowned his natural timidity at the barrel and now risked all on this stroke in order to regain possession of the camp. Strangely out of place he appeared in the midst of the noisy crowd and Satterfield and Leschelles who had been so long his associates regarded him in silence, almost in sorrow.

"Come over here to us, where you belong, you hellions," a burly swaggerer shouted at the waiting line, "or we'll bring you."

The chance of retort was too good to let escape; a score of voices from the defenders invited the speaker to proceed with the job and with the invitation went caustic and profane comments upon his record, character and person.

"Will you give up that young fool Hemple, or will you not?" Lantry demanded, thrusting himself to the fore.

"We will not, to you or to anybody."

"Then come on, men, we'll get him," Lantry shouted, turning to his followers.

For a few paces they surged after him, but in the face of the determined line presented by the smaller force they lagged and finally came

to a halt. The sight of the staves of the sober, eager men, who only awaited a pretext to leap into action, caused them to pause, half-intoxicated though they were, and indeed they had not yet received the outward repulse which was necessary to kindle and inflame their passions and start them on a riotous course. Callahan was not of the temperament to adopt pacific methods. Somewhere in the mob which surrounded Lantry a humorous, drunken individual heaved a stone at the row of defenders, whereupon half a dozen of his companions took profit from his example and addressed themselves to throwing at the line of human targets; and so excellent did the idea appear that presently the whole mob stooped to gather missiles.

"Charge!" Callahan roared, who recognized a crisis.

Instantly his corps of janissaries sprang forward, covering the narrow intervening space before the disorderly mass of assailants were aware what was happening and sweeping them back in a single disorderly wave. Lantry raged at the men nearest him; but the stone-throwers were caught at a disadvantage, assaulted while yet in a stooping posture, beaten over shins, over shoulders, over heads, until they

bawled in an indescribable uproar. Those whom liquor had made uncertain upon their feet early fell to the ground in the mêlée and were trampled under heel; shovel-handles and axe-helves flew; the members of Callahan's army exchanged shouts and jests; until finally the mob which as a whole had made no concerted resistance, burst before the defenders and scattered southward. Callahan and Casey called their men back to the office.

"That will do nicely," said the time-keeper, "nicely for a starter."

But only a starter it was. Since the band of deserters were not pursued, they did not run far; they gathered together, cursing and shaking fists and rubbing bruised spots. On the skirmish-ground a few of the fallen struggled feebly, aimlessly, to climb to their feet and when this end was accomplished they stumbled away in blind meanderings until they should discover some haven where they might snore off their debauch. To these Lantry paid no attention; but he addressed the mob about him in fierce, impassioned tones.

Suddenly the watchers at the office perceived that a quarrel had broken out between him and Corbetson. The two spoke hotly, gesticulat-

ing, in turn seeking favor with the angry crowd. Whatever their opposing views,—and it appeared that Corbetson had at last balked at the violence which the other advocated—Lantry carried the crowd with him, a burst of yells rang out and bearing Corbetson with them they approached on the run.

This time they were moved by no aimless purpose. The knocks they had received, the bruises, the aching heads and shoulders, were fresh and a flame burned in their breast, an avid desire for revenge. But they did not halt in front of the office. Corbetson strove to persuade them so to do and to direct them to such a course, only to be hooted and jeered. Destruction of whatever they could lay hands on now alone would satisfy them; and the insidious suggestion which Lantry had made to tear down the camp building by building, met with their drunken approval.

The power-house had apparently been decided upon as their first point of attack. Catching up stones as they ran, a few of which were flung at the men in front of the office—the crowd swept by. For the office had at present only a minor interest; the company of

defenders under Callahan should later be attended to, according to Lantry's talk, when the camp was laid low. A savage, implacable band they were. The over-drunk, the weak, the fearful, had fallen out and of the remaining hundred-odd who pressed forward there was not one but had been transformed by liquor and the earlier defeat into a maddened, desperate destroyer.

When they came even with the mess-house, the appearance of a cook with a pan in his hand standing in the door created a temporary diversion. In spite of Lantry's efforts to keep them in the original direction, they swerved at sight of him, yelping like hounds who suddenly sight a quarry, and made for their man. All was grist that came to their mill. The cook took one startled look, uttered a yell of fright and disappeared within, followed by as many of the crowd as could wedge into the door. A clatter of outraged pans and pots sounded inside the kitchen, while from the rear the four cooks burst forth and raced to the office for safety. One still clutched a ladle, his white apron flapping wildly, his cap awry. Several of the looters even proceeded so far as to pursue them a distance. And meanwhile

the horrible uproar of maltreated tin-ware went on, until at last the marauders' vengeance had its fill in this particular channel. The cooks hiding behind the bulwark of Callahan's army swore and cursed and called down imprecations on the unholy rioters.

"They're bitin' off their nose to spite their face," said Casey, calmly. "Rest easy, you pie-makers. They'll be round for supper and that's where you get square."

Meanwhile the human inundation had passed through and over the mess-house, swallowed, spat it out and swirled on towards the power-house.

"They're growin' mean," Callahan addressed Dukane, where the whole body of defenders stood waiting and biding their time. "Lantry is a wise captain, lettin' 'em have just enough whiskey to make 'em ugly if they're crossed. What about us? Do we mix again, or do we sit idling away the time twiddlin' thumbs?"

"Give the engineer down yonder a chance first," Jimmy stated.

The doors of the power-house had been closed and barred and the windows shut. On the former the mob hurled themselves until they rattled and creaked upon their hinges, but

they were solidly built and withstood the strain. Around a corner the crowd of drunken men ran, following the first suggestion offered by one of their number, and a shower of stones cleaned out the first pair of windows. A shout of triumph traveled up the slope to the watchers, which was quickly followed by shrill screams of astonishment, pain, agony and anger. As if tossed back by a mighty blast of wind the mob curled up on itself, huddled an instant in confusion and then fled wildly away. Boiling water was an enemy not to be endured.

Of the hundred and more who had joined in this last maneuver a good score were placed *hors de combat* by the steaming, unlooked-for stream which greeted them at the window. Some of the men groaned or rolled upon the ground in suffering, sobered and conscious only of their pain. But the greater number gathered in a silent, sullen crowd and glared at the building. Lantry talked, urging, imprecating, threatening. He pointed at the mixer. The mob swung without a word in that direction and headed for it; here at least was machinery which stood unprotected, the loss of which would cause a serious stoppage of work.

"Shall we stand here and see that happen?" Callahan asked, mortally angry at the assault upon his own particular machine.

"Are you afraid to attack them?"

"Afraid, we'll drive 'em into the river!"

Like an avalanche the body of men, led by the intrepid Callahan and Casey, swept down the slope past mess-house and bunk-house, running silently, intent on the enemy. This fight would not be a joke, they well knew, and in consequence saved their breath against the time when they should need it. But the rioters who swarmed about the mixing-plant in an endeavor to wreck and destroy its machinery, observed them coming, a shout of battle-lust sounded a welcome to conflict and next minute the two forces lost their identities in a raging, swirling mass of human figures.

Out-numbered though Dukane's supporters were, out-numbered by more than two to one, they made up in sobriety, efficiency, preparedness and cohesion what they lacked in strength. Callahan and Casey rallied them continually; they clung together, having entered the midst of Lantry's followers in a solid wedge, and they had the further advantage of carrying weapons. "Every time you see a head, crack

it," had been Casey's single injunction. And this plan and direct method of warfare the assailants followed.

Yet numbers presently began to count. Among Lantry's force were men as burly, as vigorous, as active and as lustful as those who had hurled themselves down upon them. At first beaten back and under the necessity of meeting staves with fists they gave ground until the contest moved away from the mixer down towards the river, into which Callahan had promised to drive the deserters; but as Lantry's followers observed the inferiority of the others, as they gathered themselves together, by the natural magnetism of making a defense, they stood firm, shook their heads under the hail of blows and then with a sudden burst of ferocity leaped at the invaders.

Over the ground whither had moved the current of battle there lay here and there a dazed or a feebly crawling victim, who had fallen and who might have been designated as the "slain," for they were at any rate of no further use. Those who were capable of movement sought to withdraw on one side when they observed the contest swinging back once more over the same course. For Lantry's army was now in the

ascendant, and though his antagonists withdrew in good order they nevertheless were in retreat. All at once when they reached the mixer both forces as if by sudden consent ceased to struggle. They drew a little way apart and regarded each other. Of Lantry's hundred and more there remained only fifty who were not down or fled, and these bruised, bloody, torn, disreputable, ferocious, looked for all the world like some band of beggars come out of the hills to pillage. The members of Dukane's flying troop were in no better case, though thanks to their staves they had not suffered so severely in numbers.

"And how do you like the welcome, Lantry?" Callahan shouted, a great cut from which blood dripped over one eye.

"We've but begun, damn you," that worthy retorted, "and when we've had a drink to refresh us, then God help you!"

His followers caught up the suggestion, crying "a drink, a drink!" and abandoning their conquest of the mixer set out one and all for the gully where they had left the barrel of whiskey.

"Well, what do ye think of that!" Casey exclaimed, in astonishment at this ludicrous per-

formance. "They won't even stay to be entirely licked."

"Did you see Corbetson?" Callahan asked. "Lantry has taken things over and the old chief is simply driftin', don't know what to do."

"Take heed, then, Mike, for the future. Observe what comes of bad companions. And meanwhile let us look over the dead and wounded to see which need court plaster. This day I shall never forget."

A sudden roar, a united yell of rage, of disappointment, of ferocity, burst suddenly from the gully. Out from its mouth Lantry and his men poured like a swarm of streaming hornets.

"The devil's to pay about somethin', and what is it?" Casey exclaimed.

Nevertheless he and Callahan hastily gathered their cohort together and without waiting to learn the cause of this extraordinary eruption marched up to the office, where they took their old station.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE

“**W**HILE the rest of you watched them fight, I struck them at their unprotected base. In other words, I walked up yonder and tipped over what was left of the barrel of whiskey.”

Kendle spoke. His explanation was vouchsafed in respect to the mysterious rage which seemed to have all at once taken possession of the revelers when they reached the gully and which caused them immediately to return upon the camp. That the deprivation of liquor cut to their thirsty souls was only too apparent: in manner, in voice, in act, they made plain their fury. They had never dreamt of such an insidious blow.

“There’ll be no parleying this time,” the journalist remarked. “And they’re fit to blow everything to Kingdom Come.”

Jimmy Dukane uttered an exclamation.

“By Jove, the powder-house!”

"It's locked," Leschelles assured him.

"Yes, but locks will be nothing to that mob once it sets out to burst through and seize the dynamite."

"The door's a stout one," the second engineer maintained. And then, "Just look at the hill over yonder!"

On top of the ridge overlooking the camp, figures could be discerned moving among the scanty pines and posting themselves at points of observation. A hasty examination by Satterfield through the field-glasses showed them to be neither enemies nor friends, but an audience of curious workmen from other camps. Word of the extraordinary usurpation of power by Dukane, of the driving forth of Corbetson, of the threats by Lantry to make the youth go out of the camp feet first, of the rebellion and prospective war, had flown as ever word of imminent trouble flies to the other camps at the tunnel and upon the irrigation canal. Men flung down their tools and came to Silver Peak Dam, where choosing the ridge as a safe and excellent location to follow the fight, they settled down to watch, indifferent as to the merits of the case and hostile to neither party. Since they belonged in other camps, the outcome con-

cerned them not and they yelled equal encouragement to both forces of the combatants.

But Dukane gave them only a single hurried glance, then he turned and ran through the office into the store, where Hop Spencer maintained his watch.

"Can you shoot, Hop?" he demanded.

"I used to."

"Then if you see anyone try to get into the powder-house, shoot him down."

"Kill him?"

"Yes, kill him. For if any of those scoundrels get at the dynamite, it'll be all day with the dam, the camp and the rest of us."

"I'll do the best I can, though I ain't shot much lately."

"Pump lead at whoever tries to break the door—it will scare him even if it doesn't hit him."

Leaving Spencer busy at work filling the magazine of a Winchester with cartridges Dukane ran back into the office. As if in the men whom Callahan and Casey mustered the disappointed and enraged malcontents beheld fit subjects for their passions, they made straight for them, their eyes flashing, their hands clenched. This was the crucial moment. Cor-

betson, who had given up hope of regaining the office, now had hope revived and cheered the men on to the attack; while Lantry asked nothing better than to continue the fight. Before the office then the battle was presently raging, this time with a desperation unequalled by any previous assault. Roused by the bold and threatening cries of their assailants, the defenders displayed an equally aggressive spirit, swinging their axe-helves merrily when they had not lost them and resorting to fists when they had.

"If we only had a reserve force to throw into the ruction," Jimmy Dukane growled.

"Come out here where I can get a hand on you," Lantry shouted. "Of course, you hold back and look on, you coward!"

All the hatred of the man which had been nurtured in his breast for weeks flamed up in Jimmy, all the desire to beat this enemy into helpless dust, to grind him under heel, demolish him, surged in his bosom and he made a leap towards the fight in response to the taunt. But Satterfield caught him by the arm.

"Let me go, let me go!" Dukane cried, angrily striking at the detaining hand.

"No, they'd kill you in there."

"Let me go, I don't care."

Leschelles had come to Satterfield's assistance and together they dragged the furious youth back into the office, where they expressed themselves vigorously upon the subject of such recklessness. Indeed, Jimmy came quickly to his senses when Satterfield pointed out, speaking in a calm, ironical voice, that the battle was going against them and in another five minutes Corbetson would once more be sitting in the office chair.

"Not much he won't, not while we've got fire arms," Jimmy declared, rushing to the inner store door.

A minute later he returned bearing a load of shot guns and rifles, which he stacked near the door ready to hand.

"If anyone attempts to enter here, blow him to pieces," he exclaimed.

And indeed a warning was necessary. Calahan was down, overwhelmed by enemies and handicapped by the lack of one arm; Casey continued to fight on at the head of his remaining supporters, keeping them about him in a compact mass which should offer the greatest resistance and work the most effective injury. Suddenly they were swept aside, beaten down

and rendered helpless. Lantry and a score of men, wearing the dust and blood of their fierce encounter, appeared before the office door.

"We'll pay you out now, you scum," Lantry roared triumphantly, shaking a fist at Dukane and licking his lips.

Dukane lifted a shot gun into sight; other weapons were thrust out the windows in the faces of the rioters who shrank back. An unholy light of joy filled Jimmy's eyes, a reckless smile transformed his visage; he thrust the muzzle of the shot gun first at Lantry, then at Corbetson, both of whom had crowded towards him.

"Come another step and receive the load of lead that's waiting for you," he cried.

A shot gun is an ugly weapon, far more effective at close range than a rifle and exceedingly wider in its action, and the average man has a greater dread of its effects than of the other and higher-powered gun. Lantry and Corbetson hastily withdrew. Curses flowed from the lips of the former, as he recognized that numbers would not count here and that an attack upon the office would be a needless waste of life.

"What will you do now?" he exclaimed, turn-

ing fiercely to Corbetson. "I've got the men for you and I've won the fight—can't you use that brain of yours to think of something?"

But the former chief, now that his last hope was destroyed, appeared given over to despair. Without answering in words he shook his head and stared in a daze at the ground.

"And I thought you were a man!" Lantry scoffed, derisively. "If I'd known what sort of stuff you're made of, I'd never have gone into this thing with you." With which he turned his back on Corbetson.

At that instant Callahan who had lain apparently in a stupor from a blow received in the scrimmage, suddenly reached forth his one hand from where he lay, seized Lantry by the ankle and jerked his feet out from under him. Next instant the pair were locked in each other's embrace, rolling and fighting upon the ground, to the astonishment of Lantry's followers, who, however, presently recovered sufficiently to run forward and attempt to kick Callahan in head or body.

"By heaven, I won't stand that!" Dukane shouted, to anybody who cared to hear.

Bounding out of the office door, still gripping his shot gun as he ran and emitting a

blood-curdling yell he raced towards the hostile group. That they were startled at this sudden and unexpected attack is putting it lightly; but they turned to meet him. With the barrel of his gun pointing over their heads, Dukane let go one barrel, at the same instant giving vent to another terrifying yell. In the midst of the confusion that followed, a confusion of shouts and shrieks from men who expected next to receive a scattering fire of shot in their faces, Jimmy stuck the barrel of the gun skyward and fired again.

After him came the others pouring out of the office—Satterfield, Leschelles, Kendle and the reporter, each swinging a gun ready to deal execution. When the smoke cleared the battle-field was bare, except for the victors, for the wounded of the earlier *mêlée* and for Callahan and Lantry who fought to grasp each other's throat; the enemy had fled, was still fleeing.

Dukane dropped his gun and pounced on Lantry.

"Get a rope, Leschelles, get a rope," he called over his shoulder.

When the assistant engineer had brought a piece of rope from the store they tied up the captive, after dragging him away from Calla-

han and bound him to a chair in the office. Dukane was jubilant; even Satterfield viewed the prisoner with an air of satisfaction, for without question Lantry it was who had been the active spirit in organizing and developing the riot. With him out of the way the rest of the men should be easily taken care of, since they would be without leadership.

"The worst is over," the doctor said, "I can now go out and look for broken heads."

But in this he was mistaken. The men who had fled so ignominiously stopped, gathered about Corbetson and fell into vigorous consultation. Altogether there were forty or fifty, counting those who had been temporarily disabled but who had returned for another try of fortunes, and the whole group displayed no disposition to abandon the battle. Committed as they were already they were not in a mood to stop at half a loaf. Corbetson, too, now that Lantry had been removed from active participation and leadership, suddenly developed courage under the responsibility of directing the crowd. With quick, sharp words which the men before the office could hear but not distinguish, he addressed his companions pointing now here, now there, about the camp.

All at once there came a clatter of hoofs on

the road and Enid Crofton galloped up to where Dukane and his companions stood before the office watching the opposite party.

"Are you safe, unhurt?" she demanded. "I've sat off over yonder waiting and looking, but could see only half the time what was going on. Now I can't stand it any longer, I'm going to stay here."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Jimmy declared, sternly. "This is no place for a girl."

"If you send me away now, it will be forever," she answered, in a low voice but one carrying a threat.

"But, the deuce!—you can't stay around with stones and everything else flying."

"We shall see whether I can." She dismounted and looked at him with an air of hauteur. "I come and go as I please."

"I'll lock you up in the closet," he cried, angrily.

"Hardly," was the calm reply. "Besides I love you, and shall go where you go."

"Of all stubborn—" he began.

But at that instant Satterfield touched him on the elbow, pointing towards the mess-houses.

"What do you think they're doing?" he asked.

Dukane gazed hard at the buildings behind

which the disloyal workmen were busy appearing and disappearing as they moved about. All at once a thin column of smoke rose up and floated away on the breeze.

"Callahan—Casey—gather men and stop that!" Satterfield ordered.

Of the original forty defenders who had stood in line to receive the invaders, scarcely a one remained but who carried marks of the various struggles in which they had engaged. A dozen assembled quickly in response to Callahan's call, another dozen limped and crawled forward to the spot, bearing cut heads, broken hands or ribs, or cruelly bruised bodies. Over the ground were scattered the forms of men, friends and foes, some unconscious, some painfully injured and content to keep quiet, some slumbering in the peaceful bliss of drunkenness; and of these of all sorts, the far greater numbers were of Lantry's force, who remained the evidence of the dexterity, quickness and strength of Dukane's small loyal band.

"We are ready," Callahan stated.

"Stay where you are, I'll not send men who have already fought so well into an uneven battle," Dukane announced.

"'Tis not uneven. We are the equal of them all, and more."

"I'll not have you beaten up again, even if they do burn the bunk-houses."

Such, indeed, was the apparent intention of the men moving about those structures. Under cover of their walls they had heaped up enough sticks and splinters to kindle a flame against one of the box-like sides, which the tarpaper and dry boards readily fed. In two minutes a dense column of smoke rose from one building, while almost immediately another ascended from the second bunk-house, and then with a roar and a rush of flames the two buildings were engulfed in fire.

The watchers looked on in silence. Here was the first felonious act of the rioters and marked an advance in the degree of their desperation. The smoke rolled northward on the gentle breeze, filling every ravine and interstice of the northern hills and presently obscured them from view. The observers from the other camps lined the top of the ridge, sitting silent or gesticulating in excited conversation.

"That is the beginning of the end," Satterfield remarked, removing his eye-glasses. "It's only a matter of time now when they will get around to the other buildings and the machinery."

Higher and blacker rolled the smoke from the two burning houses. As if the spectacle which these constituted for the time satisfied Corbetson's men's appetite for destruction, they drew back as the heat increased, but continued about the fires interested watchers, occasionally shouting a jest among themselves.

It was about five o'clock when the perpetrators of this deed, sated by fire and smoke, turned to cast about for other material upon which to put their destructive hand. Evening was not very far off. The long afternoon rays were slanting down into the basin at an angle which indicated that they would soon be blocked by the western portion of the ridge. Spoilers and despoilers both sought to accomplish something definite and final before the fall of darkness, though Dukane and his companions had most to fear from the added dangers which it would bring and the protection it would afford the rioters.

"Didn't you wire for the sheriff of this county to come here?" Kendle, the cement man, inquired thoughtfully.

"Yes, if he's coming, now would be a good time for him to arrive."

"He'll probably take his time."

At this point in the talk Enid Crofton who had been filling the part of an unobtrusive observer, suddenly led her pony on one side, mounted and swung its head about until she faced the men.

"What do you want with a sheriff when father has a dozen cowboys over yonder?" And she pointed her quirt in the direction of the ranch-house.

"The difference is this, Miss Crofton," Satterfield explained with a smile, "the cowboys would do very well, but they represent mere force; the sheriff represents constituted and lawful authority."

"It seems to me that this is a time for force instead of authority," she sniffed. "Look at them; how much attention would they pay to a sheriff or any other officer?"

Truly, to judge by the mob's new course this was a question which answered itself. They were now running towards that part of the camp which comprised the power-plant, the mixer and the machinery for loading and operating the aerial tramway. A few of the hardier spirits repeated their rush upon the doors of the power-plant, but when a stream of boiling water again lashed out of a window at

them directed by the vigilant engineer, they swerved to one side and followed their companions.

They fell upon the mixer, wrestled with it, beat it with rods of iron, but worked little damage upon its frame.

"That's a tough nut to crack," Dukane stated with a laugh, as he and the others watched the assault, "and I ought to know, having worked in its shadow."

Giving up the conquest of this the mob swung eastward at a run. With a quick shout they sprang at the first supporting tower of the aerial tramway, wrapped a rope about its props and with a tug pulled it down. Accomplishment warmed their blood and fired their ardor. They ran to the next tower and hurled it crashing, and the next, and the next, working with rapid, eager hands, until the whole aerial cable lay in disorder upon the ground.

"The dam, the dam!" rose from their lips.

On the instant every man of them turned running towards the spot where the low gray bulwark of the partially completed dam lay in the gorge between the cliffs. Corbetson, even more than the men he led, experienced a fierce, consuming desire to destroy the work on which he had hoped to found a fortune, but which

had served only to convict him of a crime. He would wipe out his disgrace, he would destroy the evidence of his false work, tumble it into the river in dust and indistinguishable fragments. Inspired therefore by such sentiments, the prey of fear, shame, bitterness, he shouted as loud as any, "The dam, the dam!" and waved the men on.

For what now remained to him? All the camp, all Silver Peak Basin, all the world, had turned against him and sought to cause his ruin; Satterfield and Leschelles and the doctor had betrayed him at the word of a nondescript young ruffian who had tricked him into criminal admissions, his workmen would have abandoned him had he not bribed them to a questionable loyalty with liquor and a promise of large wages, and finally the girl whom he loved, for whom he had never dared to confess his affection, had scorned him and openly chosen and defended Hemplé. Destruction he would work: he would a last time walk through the camp like an avenging angel, leaving smoke and ruin in his rear, and then depart. Money he had waiting for him on the outside, money from the illegal business of the store, that would serve.

With these desperate and evil thoughts

flashing through his brain he led his men up the road to the dam, uttered quick commands and pointed at the spots where they should make their attack. Responsive to his orders they struggled up the rocks to the iron rods which held the network of cables in place and sought to rip them loose; but this was not easy, the men's footholds were precarious, they had little room to use their crow bars and the cables were stout. Upon the dam itself men had scattered out and were tearing off scaffolding, tipping piles of lumber into the chasm and heaving tools into the depths. But this did not touch the dam itself. Corbetson stamped with impotent rage at the men's stupidity, looked up at the mountains where the sunset rays were beginning to lie golden, down at the bed of the stream where the water ran black through the spill-way, then at the dam itself. A thought leaped into his mind, he thrust his hand into his pocket where he carried his keys.

"Stop this child's play, men," he shouted at the top of his voice, so as to be heard over the subdued noise of the canyon. "Dynamite it!"

Dynamite! At that word men instinctively caught their breaths; it conjured up a vision

of destruction magnificent in proportion and splendid in conception. Dynamite—that were something worth while indeed! Those who heard the word hastened to the spot where Corbetson stood and those who were too far away to understand, yet perceiving from the actions of the others that something new was in the wind, gave over the matter upon which they chanced to be engaged and hurried to join their companions.

To those who watched from the office this sudden decision was significant.

“What’s up now!” Leschelles exclaimed, who was staring at them through the field-glasses.

“Oh, Jimmy, I wish this was over,” whispered Enid. “Somebody will yet be killed.”

“I hope so—and I want to do the killing if Corbetson is to be the victim. But no! I’ll enjoy much better to see him going at a lock step in prison and wearing an abbreviated hair cut.”

“How vindictive you are!”

“I certainly am. He’s caused me a lot of trouble.”

“Perhaps he holds similar thoughts about you.”

This remark Jimmy did not deign to answer.

He fixed his gaze upon the group of recalcitrant workmen who surrounded Corbetson and hid him from view. That he was making an impassioned appeal was apparent, that they listened willingly was also obvious, and that something fresh was about to happen was likewise easy to observe. The men pressed together in a close group; over their heads, high up on the south rim of the canyon, were scores of workmen from the other two camps, who had moved along the ridge until they came to the lip of the precipice, whence they could behold all that might pass on the dam below them.

Jimmy looked away from the belligerents and over the camp. In the power-house the engineer and fireman leaned out of the windows, following proceedings and holding themselves ready for any further attack; the engineer picked his teeth calmly as though flushing men with boiling water was an every day occurrence. What was left of the two bunk-houses had sunk into two beds of glowing ashes, from which smoke still rose and passed away upon the wind. Over the ground the doctor moved, engrossed in his professional business of examining wounded men to determine the extent of their injuries.

"Here they come!" Leschelles announced, as Dukane once more directed his gaze towards the dam.

"What are they going to do?" Enid asked him, anxiously.

He shook his head, he did not know. No more did the others of the party know what idea had taken possession of the mob's mind. At a run the whole party poured down the road which had been blasted out of the rock-wall and which descended at a gradual incline to the camp. Memory of another day came vividly to Dukane's thought as he watched the crowd advance with Corbetson a dozen paces in the lead, memory of the noon when he had raced across the river, sped up the opposite road and pulled Enid from her horse and to safety one instant before the firing of the blast. And now what a change! Who could have foretold; who imagined, all that had occurred in the interim, so swiftly and so momentously! He, James A. Dukane, Jr., who had come into camp a disreputable vagabond, was now in command, while Corbetson who had scorned him that day had fallen from his high seat and now ground his teeth in disgrace.

At the bottom of the incline the mob turned

and headed without pause for the powder house, isolated from the other buildings and half sunk in the earth.

"They're going to blow up the dam, by the Almighty!" Leschelles exclaimed, in a loud voice.

Dukane looked about him, licking his lips like an angry wildcat. He knit his brows, waiting. At that instant there sounded from far up the road by the Crofton ranch-house, the faint long-drawn musical note of an automobile siren. But the watchers heard it without understanding, without attention.

The mob reached the door of the powder-house, crowded about it. Evidently the men hampered Corbetson with the key, for he waved them back until he stood free and alone. He twisted the key in the lock, then flung up a hand in triumph, turning to his followers.

A streak of flame suddenly spat from the store-window, Corbetson's hand sank, clutched at his breast. Then slowly he pitched forward and lay on his face.

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW REGIME

AT this sudden and wholly unexpected visitation of death upon their leader, the mob halted dumbfounded in its raid. All thought of dynamite, of blowing up the dam, of finishing the destruction of the camp, was erased from their minds by the sight of their stricken captain: and as he was laid low in his moment of triumph, so their passions ceased, their wild formless hatred evaporated and they stood stupid, bewildered, not knowing what to do or where to turn. Then those in the rear began silently and unobtrusively to withdraw, to set out skirting the ridge on their way to Tunnel-town; others glancing about perceived the movement; and presently as by a miracle where there had been a roaring, tumultuous crowd, there remained but the lifeless corpse of the former chief.

Those before the office could scarcely credit their eyes, so utterly unexpected and extraor-

dinary were the men's panic and retreat. They watched in perplexed astonishment the followers of the dead man stream southward, quickening their pace as they advanced, as they passed further away, appearing to experience a growing dread of what had happened, a sudden horrified realization.

"And all that is left of them is Lantry there in the office and the drunken sleepers," Kendle stated.

Everyone breathed relief; it was as if a weight had been flung off their shoulders, a threatening sword removed from above their heads.

"But who fired that shot?" Lieschelles exclaimed, remembering the strange mysteriousness of it.

"I did."

Hop Spencer spoke the words; he had joined the group unnoticed, and now stood gazing with gloomy brow at the figure before the powder-house door.

Dukane laid a hand on his shoulder. "You did well," said he. "You obeyed orders like a soldier and you saved we know not what greater loss of property and life. If those ruffians had once secured the dynamite

the whole basin would have been at their mercy."

"I fired as you told me," Hop said. "I didn't want to kill him—but I kind of felt I had to when I saw he had unlocked the door. And I knew I wouldn't miss—I had killed squirrels farther away than that."

"Think no more of it, or rather think proudly of it."

A new and utterly surprising occurrence took place, one which was a fitting and dramatic close to the day. Down the road that followed the river to the camp a large high-powered motor car rushed into sight, swung up the slope to the office and came to a quick halt. In the front seat the chauffeur sat alone, in the tonneau were two gentlemen, dust-covered and be-goggled. They pulled off their glasses, stepped forth when the driver sprang down and opened the door, then surveyed the spectators.

"Where is Corbetson?" one asked briskly, a slender gentleman. "Hello, is that Satterfield! Where's the chief?"

Satterfield pointed at the powder-house, whither several persons were hurrying.

"He is dead—there he lies."

"Dead! Good heavens!"

"You've just missed seeing a small war, Mr. Agnew."

The other gentleman, a solid, heavy-boned man, who stood back listening, now advanced and thrust a telegram into the engineer's hands.

"What does this mean? Where is my son, if it is my son who sent it?"

Satterfield cast a glance about him, but at that instant a subdued voice said:

"Here I am."

"Come here," the new arrival ordered.

There was sternness in his voice, a hint of thunder, and it was therefore not without trepidation that the youth emerged from behind the forms of the other men where he had instinctively sought shelter when he perceived the identity of the passengers of the motor car. For the first time in his life he felt abashed, felt his earlier assurance melt from him and saw his parent looming before him hugely. Any man, he suddenly acknowledged, who could be master of not only one project but a dozen like Silver Peak Reservoir Dam, who could at his pleasure make men move individually and in the mass to his will, was a man to be respected

and feared. He saw that Dukane senior was infinitely greater a man than Dukane junior.

"Come here," his parent ordered, and pointed a finger at a spot directly in front of him.

Jimmy moved to that spot.

"Give an account of yourself. What have you been doing?"

"I've been killing people," the youth responded, modestly.

"I don't in the least doubt it."

Jimmy made no reply. This was an altogether different reception from what he had planned and the blood rose hotly in his cheeks when he remembered the rest of the group who were witnesses of his humiliation. And Enid was present! He gripped his palms and compressed his lips and looked his father belligerently in the face.

"Well, you look half-murdered yourself," was the elder's unsympathetic comment, after inspecting his son's bandaged eye and battered face. "Now, explain this telegram."

"It's correct, sir; I'm in charge."

"By what authority?"

Jimmy gazed at the ground. This was the one question which he had foreseen hanging at

a distance like a black cloud and now it was upon him.

"By the authority of—of eminent domain," he replied, with a heaven-born inspiration.

Satterfield never showed himself more a friend than at that moment. He had seen the younger Dukane's embarrassment, distress and shame; he knew that the boy found it more difficult to inform his father of what he had done and what he sought to do than he would have found it to relate to any other person; and his own chivalrous nature was stirred to speak. Thereupon he drew Jimmy on one side and addressed the newcomers.

"Gentlemen, you have arrived at the very instant we had succeeded in re-establishing order in the camp. The events which terminated in Mr. Corbetson's death have been important and considerable; and the part that your son has played in them has been not only conspicuous but extremely brave. If you will come into the office—and the rest of you also—I'll give an account of what happened as I know it."

"Very well."

For half an hour Mr. Dukane and his companion, the manager of the San Francisco

branch, listened without comment to the story of Corbetson's perfidy and the youth's single-handed, uphill investigation. To this the doctor, Leschelles, Kendle and the reporter contributed.

"And who is this young lady?" Mr. Dukane at last inquired.

Jimmy quickly led Enid forward. "I am pleased to make you acquainted with her, for in the first place she saved my life, and has consented to marry me in the second—and I love her madly, dad."

"You've not yet mentioned her name."

"Enid Crofton—and there's no one in the world like her."

"He's quite incorrigible, sir," she smiled.

The elder Dukane looked at his son, then at the girl and once more at his son. This was not the youth who had flitted about New York spending money in idle pleasure; but his heart warmed to this new and strange son, a son whose hands were brown and calloused, whose clothes were a workman's, whose face showed the marks of struggle, who had suddenly blossomed forth under labor and blows into a man, who indeed had at last saved the name of Dukane and Company from dishonor.

"And you, Miss Crofton, is it true that you've consented to marry this good-for-nothing, disreputable brawler?" he asked.

Enid's eyes flashed.

"How dare you say that!" she cried. "And of your own son! He has acted nobly and I love him, loved him long before I knew what his real name was. He's not disreputable and he's not a brawler!"

"Your vindication is sufficient," he answered, with twinkling eyes. "I retract my statement. Come with me, James." Then to the others. "I'll ask you to remain here a little while." And he led the boy forth into the air, now golden with evening. Slipping his arm into his son's, he said, "Tell me all about it, Jimmy."

As they walked through the camp the youth felt his restraint melt away, felt himself drawn by cords of affection and opened his heart to his father. He related his adventure in Melton the morning following his arrival in that town, how he had been robbed, beaten and thrown out of the hotel, how he had nearly starved, how he had been stirred to curiosity by the peculiar actions of the station-master in handling the cement and how at last he had been pummeled by Miller into an unwilling agree-

ment to work. Followed an account of his painful toil at the mixing machine and on the wagons, of his suspicions of Corbetson, of his discoveries in the store and of his final struggle with the dishonest chief.

He pointed out the smouldering ashes of the bunk-houses; they strolled to the mixer where Jimmy narrated how Callahan had lost his arm; and then they passed to the dam. Each incident was painted in glowing colors by Dukane junior's awakened imagination; and the youth's father heard and questioned and smiled to himself.

When they stood on the dam overlooking the rushing water and considered the infamous work wrought under the dead chief's hand, Dukane senior experienced a profound emotion; the reputation which he had built up by a lifetime of work, a reputation for honest, careful substantial work, had been imperiled by one crafty man and had in the end been saved by his own son, his own flesh and blood.

"I've much to thank you for, my boy," he said, in an agitated voice, "I can never repay you."

"Oh, yes, you, can!"

"Name the way."

"Let me build it; give me Satterfield and the others to help and let me build it right. I don't know much about cement, but I'm learning. When I'm done, it'll be a dam to be proud of."

Half a minute Dukane senior considered before replying:

"Take it, you've earned the right."

Down the long sloping road blasted out of the canyon wall they went on their return to the office. Jimmy pointed across to the opposite side, relating how he had run thither to rescue Enid Crofton, receiving a scolding for it and losing his heart.

The camp had assumed once more an air of tranquillity; men moved about freely and at peace, the figure of the dead chief had been borne away, smoke no longer rose from the ashes of the burnt bunk-houses and the cooks were busily engaged preparing supper for the loyal workmen. Over all the valley the amethyst light was slowly deepening to purple. The subdued music of the river floated upon the air, while beneath it ran the deeper, muffled diapason of the echoing canyon.

"That always made me think of you, dad," Dukane junior said, pointing at Silver Peak.

The mountain rose silent, sufficient unto

itself, solid and massive. The white crest shone in the last rays of the sun which touched it, marked in strong contrast to the lower crags and the black forest-clad flanks. An air of dominating calm rested upon it and its bulk commanding the surrounding hills and mountains, over-shadowing the Basin, exercised a powerful and benign influence. After the events of the day and week, after the long period of distrust, suspicion, contempt and hatred felt for Corbetson, after the dangers escaped and the hardships endured it seemed to extend a benediction. As Jimmy gazed at it there came into his heart a sudden rush of affection, of good cheer, of comfort, happiness, and joy for the world at large. The obstacles that had blocked his path here were swept away, the passions that had pressed and flowed about his person in angry currents were quieted; and was it not after all the spot where he had gained his manhood, won his battle and found his love?

“Now, what of this young lady?” Dukane senior inquired.

That was the magic word that unlocked the fountain. Jimmy poured forth a panegyric of Enid’s beauty, courage and virtues; he gave

an account of their growing friendship and love, with the final dénouement of her rescue when he was in the hands of Lantry and his men on top of the ridge.

"You will marry her then?" the father asked, smiling.

"This minute, if she would agree."

"I imagine it would be necessary to obtain her consent. She seems a young lady with a mind of her own."

"Of course, I wouldn't marry any other kind."

"And after you're married, what are your plans to support her?"

Jimmy looked at his parent out of the corner of his eye.

"When I've finished with the dam, I'll have to go to work as a day-laborer again, I imagine, unless Dukane and Company finds my services so valuable it can't afford to lose them."

His father laughed outright.

"We'll try and find something to employ you at," he assured his son. "What about this Lantry? He must be prosecuted of course."

"Certainly. He is an untamed brute. We'll run down Corbetson's affairs, see just

how much he robbed the company of and try to recover as much of his spoils as possible. Satterfield is the real engineer of the camp—he'll look after the actual building. I want to put Hop Spencer in charge of the store, for he's stuck by me like a true friend and he's a cripple. I'd like to send the station-agent at Melton to prison for his share in Corbetson's plot, though I don't believe he profited by it to any great extent, but for the sake of his wife who fed me when I was starving and treated me like a human being when everyone else was giving me kicks, I'll let him go." Then with a sudden thought, Jimmy stopped and exclaimed. "How did it happen you arrived so soon?"

"We were on our way here in a special train when your telegram as well as a digest of the newspaper account was wired to us from San Francisco," Dukane senior explained. "I had taken up the search for you in person—and since at Melton you vanished, at Melton I decided to begin. We were on our way here when this news that something unusual was taking place quickened us. A telegram from you after weeks of silence seemed unbelievable."

"You must stay a day or two and become ac-

quainted with Enid and her father, with Satterfield and Leschelles and the doctor—they're fine, every one of them and honest as daylight. And then there are Callahan and Casey and Miller and Hop Spencer, you ought to know them, for they're square and real men even if they do work for day wages."

Mr. Dukane's eyes twinkled. "I'll be glad to meet them. Perhaps they'll be able to throw side-lights on your adventures here. Miller, for instance, who brought you into camp."

In front of the office they joined the others who waited. A plan had already been made by Enid Crofton whereby the newcomers were to be guests at the ranch-house so long as they remained in Silver Peak Basin.

"I jump at the chance, for I want to become better acquainted with my daughter-to-be," he said taking and pressing her hand.

Enid regarded him a full minute before speaking.

"Why, you're not a terrible man at all!" she cried.

"Of course not, I'm very ordinary," he smiled, at this naïveté.

"But Jimmy pictured you as heartless."

"Jimmy and I both had, I learn, a mistaken

notion about each other. And now let us go."

Away from the office the motor car circled, amid the waved adieus of the men who remained, and spun swiftly up the road to the Crofton ranch.

"Your son, sir, looked nothing like you when first I saw him riding into camp on a freight wagon," Enid stated to Mr. Dukane.

"The world had used me pretty rough," the youth said. "But I wouldn't have missed it, that and the rest which has happened, for a million dollars." And he gave Enid's hand a little squeeze.

That evening after supper while Mr. Crofton entertained his guests upon the broad veranda the pair of lovers strolled across the lawn to where the brook, hidden by the gloom of the bordering trees, murmured over its bed of stones on its way to join the river. High in the sky the stars shone bright and large, for the moon was not yet risen. In the north the dark, vague outline of Silver Peak stood forth like a sentinel, a silvery sheen disclosing its snow-clad head. Over all the valley was silence, save for the murmurous streams, and peace.

"How strange it all seems now!" Enid said. "After the fight on the ridge up yonder last night, after all the uncertainty and suspense and strife of to-day, how quiet! You have won your victory, sweetheart, and you were right, always right, in your suspicions, in your aims, in your endeavors."

Dukane caught her within his arms and strove to distinguish her face and see her eyes.

"Best of all, I've won you. We shall live here when we're married until the dam is finished, but though we may go away, our love shall be always fresh and enduring."

"And sometimes we'll come back?"

"Sometimes, yes. We'll stand on the ridge up there and look down upon the great lake of water which the dam holds and recall all that took place on this spot."

She crept closer within his arms.

"I shall always love you best as you used to be, tired and ragged and battered."

The youth sighed.

"Jimmy Hemple is gone forever; I wonder if his ghost will sometimes haunt the lake? But Jimmy Dukane will love you far better than Hemple ever could."

And the brook listening to his words, whispered them to itself as it slipped away to the river, these words and others of love and loyalty and devotion.

THE END

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